NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF ON TUESDAY, 8TH SEPTEMBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Jon Clayden (Chair), Claire Winchester (Vice-Chair), Sadie Billing, David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Dominic Griffiths, Nigel Mason, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Martin Prescott, Paul Ward and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

In Attendance: *Reuben Ayavoo (Policy & Community Manager), Jo Doggett (Director - Regulatory), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Director - Environment), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeanette Lowden (Shared Service Manager - Waste), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer) and Cassi Wright (Safeguarding Team Leader).*

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

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, and Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory.

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 01 minutes 46 seconds

There were no apologies for absence received.

17 MINUTES - 9 JUNE 2026

Audio Recording – 02 minutes 02 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 June 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

N.B. Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason entered the Council Chamber at 19:33.

18 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 02 minutes 48 seconds

There was no other business notified.

19 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 02 minutes 53 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.

N.B. Councillor Nigel Mason entered the Council Chamber at 19:35.

20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 03 minutes 55 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

21 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 03 minutes 59 seconds

The Chair noted one urgent item in relation to Keystage CIC and the treatment of housing benefit overpayments. The Chair provided details for its urgency and advised that the full Urgency Notice for this item had been published on the Council website

22 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 05 minutes 24 seconds

There were no called-in items.

23 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 05 minutes 29 seconds

No questions had been submitted by Members.

24 INFORMATION NOTE: ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING AND PROTECTING CHILDREN AND ADULTS 2025-26

Audio recording – 05 minutes 34 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, presented the Information Note entitled ‘Annual Review of Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Adults 2025-26’ and advised that:

- The Council continued to maintain robust safeguarding arrangements alongside Hertfordshire County Council and partner agencies to identify, record and refer concerns relating to children, adults with care needs, domestic abuse and more.

- 479 external safeguarding referrals were made in 2025/26 compared to 454 in the previous year, which was thought to be due to improved awareness, recording, and organisational oversight rather than an increase in incidents.
- Adult referrals had increased from 397 to 432 on the previous year, while child referrals decreased from 57 to 47.
- Revised mandatory face-to-face training, improved staff inductions and other measures had contributed to the significant progress made to strengthen safeguarding processes.
- The Safeguarding Team was fully staffed with a full-time team leader in post since April 2026.
- Maintaining effective referrals and training arrangements, responding to increasingly complex mental health cases, and supporting work around domestic abuse and modern slavery were priorities for 2026/27.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Sadie Billing

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths entered the Chamber at 19:41.

In response to questions, the Safeguarding Team Leader advised that:

- Thresholds for referrals were determined by Hertfordshire County Council, and this was considered while encouraging referrals where possible, although partner agencies would sometimes inform them that referral thresholds had not been met.
- Contact details for support services were shared with individuals who did not give consent to a referral and the information from these interactions was also recorded. A referral might be reoffered to individuals that they worked with on a longer-term basis.
- Child safeguarding referrals may have decreased due to the change in process for referring domestic abuse to Survivors Against Domestic Abuse.
- Repeat referrals were monitored, and escalation to partner agencies would take place if concerns were apparent.
- It was difficult to track the progress of referrals as follow-up information was not always received from partner agencies like the Mental Health Service.
- Referrals were predominantly received from Herts Careline, with a significant number from the Housing and Homelessness Advice and Customer Services teams too.

In response to questions, the Policy & Community Manager advised that:

- There was no duplication of safeguarding services as referrals were received by the Council and ensured to be adequate before being sent to the County Council, who undertook the support and investigation work.
- Extra resource within the team had allowed the Council to build on its safeguarding processes.

The Chair thanked the Safeguarding Team for their presentation.

25 INFORMATION NOTE: WASTE AND RECYCLING UPDATE

Audio recording – 16 minutes 51 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the Information Note entitled 'Waste and Recycling Contract Performance' and advised that:

- A significant increase in recycling and a reduction in residual waste had been seen one year on from the waste contract change, which had been a huge transformation project involving multiple service areas.
- Issues arising from the contract change had been resolved as quickly as possible.
- The information note included a breakdown of communal collection issues, household composting performance, recycling performance and reasons why expected increases had not occurred, as well as lessons learned from issues and actions taken to improve service reliability.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Caroline McDonnell

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- Data on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relating to missed collections was not detailed in the information note as this was regularly reported on elsewhere.
- If a bin was not presented, it was not classified as a missed collection.

In response to questions, the Shared Service Manager – Waste & Recycling advised that:

- There had been a peak in missed garden waste bin collections around the garden waste subscription period as several residents had not renewed their subscription but reported their bin as missed.
- Missed garden waste bin collections were above the target level but they were investigating ways to reduce this through monitoring of repeat missed bins and hotspots.
- Residential management companies were invited to attend engagement programmes to ensure that communal bin stores were kept clear and accessible as identified in the report.
- Additional signage, replacement stickers for bins, and new leaflets had been provided for communal areas who had experienced collection issues.
- Each issue was investigated by Veolia in conjunction with the Waste Team as unique problems could arise and a one size fits all approach was not appropriate.
- Carboard and fibre bins in communal areas could have been larger at the start of the waste contract change in hindsight, but the Waste Team had experienced resourcing issues at the time, which had impacted service delivery and consideration of issues like this.
- Additional staff had joined the Waste Team since the start of the contract change to maintain service delivery while addressing problems.
- The shift to recycling soft plastics had been a success and smoothed the transition to a 3-weekly collection cycle, and they would continue to provide communications to residents to increase their awareness on recycling soft plastics.

- Missed bin collections had decreased through the year, and regular meetings took place with their contractors to see what contributed and how they could resolve issues.
- Lost local knowledge of collection routes resulting from the contract change had contributed to more missed bin collections initially, but this had been stabilised with new crews, continued training and tablets to assist crews with collections.
- Performance indicators within the waste contract were monitored monthly.
- National recycling rates were recorded annually, and they were aiming to be in the top 5 local authorities in England if they met their aspiration of greater than 60%, which they hoped to continue to increase every year.
- The top 10 authorities in England in terms of recycling rate operated a variety of collection arrangements and frequencies.
- The Waste Team worked in conjunction with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP), who were responsible for recycling centres and waste disposal, and data for recycling centres could be provided by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).
- The decrease in residual waste influenced by the waste contract change had resulted in an overall decrease in costs to HCC related to waste disposal.
- Improvements would be made to food waste caddy positioning after collections.
- Garden waste subscribers received emails before the subscription period became live, and promotion on social media was also done in advance, but this process could be evaluated before the next subscription period.
- A promotion had been run by the Council on water buttes in the recent drought.
- The Council worked with HWP on Waste Aware campaigns, and a focus had been given to food waste recycling to decrease its presence in the residual waste stream, and Members were encouraged to promote this to residents.
- Allowing garden waste subscription renewals at any time had been considered, but it was better to align them with the beginning of the financial year and the subscription period of East Herts Council.
- Members refer members of the public having recycling issues to the Waste Team as soon as possible.
- Climate change had impacted waste collections as it had reduced garden waste over the summer due to little vegetation growth and made conditions for collection crews more challenging.
- Other factors outside climate change such as the Deposit Return Scheme would be also considered going forward.
- Missed collections were not tied to rural or urban areas and were mostly related to operation challenges, but the Waste Team looked at data to help improve service delivery.

Councillor Nigel Mason left the Chamber at 20:06 and returned at 20:08.

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

- Soft plastics were measured by weight as this was a national metric, which was frustrating as it did not have a tangible impact on the data for waste and recycling streams.
- The Climate Change and Sustainability Officer Group already monitored the ongoing impact of climate change across service areas, which would help the Council to adapt to climate change going forward.

In response to questions, Councillor Amy Allen advised that:

- Composting bins were not offered by the Council, but there was a link through the HWP to Getcomposting.com, which provided more information on composting.
- If residents saw that their residual waste bin was regularly overflowing despite sorting their waste into the relevant recycling bins, this could be a sign of unmet need, and residents experiencing this could be eligible to apply for a larger residual waste bin.

- Information on recycling household items from A-Z was available on the Council website.

The Chair and Councillors Martin Prescott and Ralph Muncer thanked the Shared Service Manager – Waste & Recycling and Waste Team for their work since the waste contract change.

26 COUNCILLOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Audio recording – 01 hours 0 minutes 49 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, presented the report entitled 'Councillor Learning and Development Annual Report' and advised that:

- This was the first annual report to be presented to the Committee following the adoption of the Learning and Development Protocol in March 2026.
- A high-level overview of learning and development was provided in the report, and political Group Leaders had been sent further information on individuals who had not completed their training.
- 84% of Members had completed all compulsory training modules, with most Members completing the GDPR, Code of Conduct, Cybersecurity and Safeguarding training at one of the in-person sessions in May 2026.
- All but 1 substitute Member of the Planning Control Committee and all but 2 Members of the Licensing and Regulation Committee had completed their mandatory training to sit on the respective Committees, and they would not be able to do so until they had completed the training.
- Training records had been added to the page of every Member on the Council website to highlight training delivered by the Council, and this would be regularly updated. Members were encouraged to attend external training as well, but this would not be recorded.
- Thanks was given to all Members that had completed their training.

Councillor Nigel Mason highlighted that bringing the protocol in had been a good idea, especially the in-person training.

Councillor Martin Prescott highlighted the quality of in-person training and commended the implementation of this.

Councillor Daniel Allen advised Members to investigate extra training available through the Local Government Association as this could be useful.

Councillor Martin Prescott proposed and Councillor Claire Winchester seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Committee noted the Annual Report on Councillor Learning and Development.

(2) That the Committee discussed and provided suggestions on Councillor Learning and Development provision and increasing Member completion.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the Councillor Learning and Development Protocol as considered and endorsed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on Tuesday 24 March 2026.

N.B. Following the conclusion of the item there was a break in proceedings at 20:39 and the meeting reconvened at 20:48. During the break, Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber and did not return.

27 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT

Audio recording – 01 hours 16 minutes 10 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant' and advised that:

- The Council had received multi-year ringfenced funding of £2.88M from MHCLG to help it meet its homelessness duties.
- Cabinet had approved the first allocation of the grant funding on 16 June.
- A 3-year settlement for all but £426K of the remaining grant funding was proposed to ensure service continuity, regardless of the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Significant amounts were proposed to be allocated to One YMCA and Lets4U, with smaller amounts proposed for other organisations as detailed in paragraph 8.13 of the report.
- A document detailing the achievements of the housing service over the last two years had been published in the Members Information Bulletin recently.
- The grant allocation would enable the Council to best meet its Housing Strategy.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that the Government decision to pause LGR in Hertfordshire would have no impact on the allocation of grant funding proposed.

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that:

- The Council inevitably had to compete with other authorities for properties to house residents both in and outside the district, but the £4-5K detailed in paragraph 8.8 of the report was one of the benchmark figures used for their spending, while also considering value for money against individual household circumstances.
- The unallocated funding for the 28/29 financial year was less as there was likely to be underspending in the first two years, and further funding such as the Rough Sleeper Grant announced by the Government after the report had been published may become available.
- Individuals from North Herts were prioritised over individuals from outside the district, except where the Council had legal responsibilities to look after specific individuals.

Councillor Claire Winchester proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approves the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from MHCLG as outlined in Table 1 in paragraph 8.13 of the report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority.

(2) The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

28 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2026-27

Audio recording – 01 hours 25 minutes 34 seconds

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2026-27' and advised that:

- The Work Programme was attached at Appendix 1 to the report.
- A site visit to Riverside Walk and Churchgate had taken place on Friday 4 September and a site visit to the Museum Collection Facility would be scheduled for October or November in due course.
- Items for the next Committee meeting included a presentation from Settle Paradigm, updates on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) future plans, Decarbonisation of Council Buildings, the Scope of the Parking Spotlight Review, and the Work Programme and Decisions Monitoring Tracker.
- Service Managers would be consulted on topics for the Crime and Disorder Matters All-Member briefing in January to share with Committee Members for consideration.
- A response to the findings of the S106 Task and Finish Group would be provided at the Cabinet meeting in November.
- Members could submit items for the Work Programme via email, in-person or through the referral form.
- Specific questions should be submitted ahead of each meeting so that responses could be coordinated with Executive Members and Officers.
- The Forward Plan published on 21 August was attached at Appendix 2 to the report, and the Decisions and Monitoring Tracker was attached at Appendix 3.
- Recommendations from the Committee on the reports for the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Funding for LGR and Churchgate had been resolved by Cabinet and Council accordingly.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor David Chalmers

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- They would await more information from central government regarding LGR before acting on the item scheduled for the next Committee meeting.
- Looking at costs associated with LGR should be specific to the Council, rather than County wide, and the LGR future plans item should be approached in an appropriate way.
- The item on the Work Programme related to the Climate Emergency would also focus on the Ecological Emergency declared by the Council.
- It was acknowledged that site visits were difficult for Members to attend on a weekday.

In response to questions, the Scrutiny Officer advised that:

- Officers would check on whether having an All-Member Briefing would discharge the Crime and Disorder function of the Council.
- Overview and Scrutiny Members would be responsible for the scope of the All-Member Briefing on Crime and Disorder Matters.

Councillor Claire Winchester proposed the recommendation in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Sadie Billing.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Martin Prescott

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- The Scope of the Parking Spotlight Review should include revenue generation from car parks, enforcement and delivering on priorities.
- An item relating to Environmental Crime should be scheduled on the Work Programme as they should look at whether more resources would need to be allocated.
- Royston Learner Pool should be put into the Work Programme.
- Having an Information Note on the activities of the Planning Enforcement Team would be useful.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Scrutiny Officer advised that the scope of the Parking Spotlight Review should be targeted rather than broad as it was only a 1-day exercise.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Chair advised that:

- The draft scope for the Parking Spotlight Review would be discussed and refined at the next Committee meeting by Members.
- Scheduling Royston Learner Pool on the Work Programme would be looked at with the relevant officers.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that Planning Enforcement Matters were reported on quarterly to the Planning Control Committee, and any discussion by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on this could not relate to specific enforcement matters.

In response to points raised during the debate, Councillor Nigel Mason advised that an Information Note relating to Planning Enforcement would likely result in the discussion of individual cases as it was a complicated topic but was happy for this to be investigated further.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that a six-monthly Work Programme meeting had been suggested ahead of the November Committee meeting.

In response to the Scrutiny Officer, Councillor Martin Prescott highlighted that there may be greater participation from Members if it was held remotely on another evening.

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

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Committee prioritised topics for inclusion in the Work Programme attached as Appendix 1 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 2, 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 log, as attached at Appendix 3.

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.

29 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 01 hours 46 minutes 56 seconds

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

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

30 PART 2 MINUTES - 18 JUNE & 2 JULY 2024, 7 JANUARY & 11 MARCH 2025 AND 9 JUNE 2026

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recording was available.

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 18 June & 2 July 2024, 7 January & 11 March 2025, and 9 June 2026 were approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

The meeting closed at 9.24 pm

Chair