

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City on Tuesday, 11th December, 2018 at 7.30 pm

Minutes

PRESENT: Councillor Cathryn Henry in the Chair

Councillors Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Sam Collins, Jean Green, Steve Jarvis, Ben Lewis, Ian Moody, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Sue Ngwala (In place of Kate Aspinwall), Helen Oliver, Janine Paterson and Martin Stears-Handscomb

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors Sue Ngwala

IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Crowley (Service Director - Commercial), Sarah Kingsley (Communications Manager), Jo Dufficy (Customer Services Manager), Rebecca Coates (Community Safety Manager), Helen Rae (Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader), Gemma Mitchell (Safeguarding Support Officer), Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager), Kirstie Wilson (Temporary Scrutiny Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Acting Committee and Member Services Manager).

47 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio Recording 1 minutes 50 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Steve Deakin - Davies.

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

Councillor Dennis – Harburg had advised that she would arrive late for the meeting.

48 MINUTES - 24 JULY 2018

Audio Recording 2 minutes 17 seconds

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 24 June 2018 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

49 MINUTES - 18 SEPTEMBER 2018

Audio Recording 2 minutes 25 seconds

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 September 2018 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

50 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio Recording 2 minutes 41 seconds

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

51 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio Recording 2 minutes 46 seconds

- (1) The Chairman asked Members and Speakers to speak into the microphones;
- (2) The Chairman reminded those present that, in line with Council policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) 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. Members declaring a declarable interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillors speaking right' must declare this at the same time as the interest.

52 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio Recording 3 minutes 18 seconds

None.

53 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio Recording 3 minutes 21 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

54 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio Recording 3 minutes 25 seconds

Since the last meeting, no decisions had been called-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

55 ANNUAL REVIEW OF SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS AT RISK (2017-18)

Audio Recording 3 minutes 28 seconds

The Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader presented the Annual Report to provide an overview of the activity within the Council over the last 12 months.

The District Council had a supportive role and a duty to report concerns about Children or Adults at risk to the relevant agencies as well as a duty to report this information to the Statutory agencies about Children or Adults at risk involved with any of the Council's services.

The Committee were provided with an overview of the referrals made during 2017/18. In total 114 referrals were made to external agencies from any Council Department. Nineteen children were referred to social care. Seven referrals were made to MARAC (Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference) or Adults experiencing domestic abuse where there were no children in those families. In order for those referrals to take place the Council required the consent from the Adults. Adults concerned were only able to be logged if they did not provide consent for referral and no further action taken.

Over the year the Council had reported thirteen adults to social care over concerns that they were experiencing abuse. In case of adults the Council had to obtain their consent to refer for support, but could provide support without consent, if the Council believed an incapacity such as dementia, temporary illness, substance misuse or another disability.

Two people were referred to the Channel Panel about concern they might have been a victim of radicalisation, and would need consent before referral.

The referral rate from the District Council had steadily increased across the last 5 years and substantially increased particularly for the last 12 month period and the 12 month before. However, rates of referrals going into Statutory Agencies, had not particularly changed during that period. This was not because more abuse was taking place, but of an increased awareness amongst Officers and increased people's confidence of how to refer.

Regarding the actions completed within the 12 month period, the most significant was that the Council had conducted corporate learning and incorporated guarding training requirements of every post possible:

- Therefore safeguarding was a mandatory course for all Officers at appropriate levels dependent on contact with children and adults at risk. Offered as an e-learning/half day/full day course, but now know what everyone needs. Excellent step forward and partly explains why the Council also had an increase in referrals.
- The Council had awareness on Trafficking and Modern Day Slavery as a mandatory course for all staff.

The following Members asked questions, which were answered by Helen Rae, Community Health & Wellbeing Team Leader & Rebecca Coates, Community Safety Manager:

- o Councillor Gerald Morris;
- o Councillor Ian Mantle;
- o Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn;
- o Councillor Sue Ngwala

RESOLVED:

That the Committee:

- i. Received and commented on the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to children.
- ii. Received and commented on the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to adults at risk.
- iii. Agreed that sufficient and robust processes are in place at NHDC for application and review of safeguarding processes, and that an annual review and presentation to this committee should continue.

REASON FOR DECISION: The resolution is the best course of action that can be accommodated within the approved budget and officer resources, that will fulfil our statutory and lawful obligations but also ensure that a regular, corporate review exists.

56 INFORMATION NOTE: HALF YEAR UPDATE ON COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3CS)

Audio Recording 21minutes 03 seconds

Jo Dufficy, Customer Service Manager and Sarah Kingsley, Communications Manager presented the half year update report for the period of April to September 2018. Comments and Complaints had increased considerably as expected, and for that reason a dashboard was included that specifically related to waste.

Members were referred to the general points in table 2.3 of the officer's report which illustrated a breakdown of 3CS received:

- Grounds maintenance few complaints variety of things i.e. hole in the grass verge; issue with the memorial bench.
- Compliments relating to flower displays and grass cutting activity.
- Area of higher number of complaints in regards to Planning Control and various such as decisions, advice given and the Planning Portal. Care line regularly receive high number of compliments for excellent service mainly from family and relatives.
- Leisure centres – all three feedback machines recently provided.
- North Herts leisure complaints re: cleanliness in changing areas and maintenance of weight machines being out of action.
- Compliments for swimming lessons and fitness classes and also staff, 31 compliments specifically at North Herts.
- Visitor numbers at North Herts Leisure had 268,000, Hitchin had 246,000 and Royston had 200,000. Heavily used services.
- LGO complaints at 2.4 of the officer's report were from two people in planning and environment control but found the same complainant. One complaint was dealt with it and we identified an error in our own process, however, LGO classified it as upheld but no significant injustice.

Large numbers of feedback regarding the Waste Service in comparison last major service update from 5 years ago (782 complaints) with the introduction of purple bins this year was far greater. Complaints peaked in July and August reflected operational issues relating to collection of brown bins and food caddy, however, this had a knock on effect with recycling bins and normal waste bins. Some areas were more impacted than others. As issues dealt with complaints these were reduced. Majority complaints were responded to fully within 20 days, normally this would be 10 days, but working under exceptional circumstances during this period.

A number of Members asked questions which were answered by Jo Dufficy, Customer Services Manager, and Sarah Kingsley, Communications Manager:

- o Councillor Steve Jarvis
- o Councillor Helen Oliver
- o Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- o Councillor Ben Lewis
- o Councillor Gerald Morris
- o Councillor Jean Green

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the half yearly update report on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3CS).

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

57 **COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2019 - 2023**

Audio Recording 1.06.12

The Communications Manager presented a new Communication Strategy, which also attached was a yearly Action Plan and Social Media Strategy as well as a Social media Policy,

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which would be placed on the Council's website. Context for the Strategy was important. Latest District wide survey was overall satisfaction was down 82% in 2015 to 75% in 2017 and decrease in agreement levels of well informed by the Council. It had been an interesting year with the waste issues and which had no doubt had an effect on the reputation of the Council. Rapid growth of our Social Media and growth increased in web visits, increasing the interest as transactional based mainly reporting or paying for something. Significant decline in our media relations activity, partly because no longer had the mid-week Mercury after being out of circulation two years ago. Recognition that the local press adopt online first approach, and print edition is secondary.

Positive and pro-active improving our reputation and restoring public confidence:

- Community Champions – celebrating all that was good about North Herts, and now had a new digital publication “NH Now” produced. Developing a more campaign approach as a Plastics Campaign and other themes across Council priorities focussing them across all channels. We are in the same boat opportunities in trade press and national press in the MJ (Municipal Journal) on commercialisation. Actively developing a film policy and location library to display areas that can be used for filming in the North Herts area. Consultation strategy also being looked into.
- Digital First – stems from press release as regards communications. This will be placed firstly on the website and social media, and to use as many channels to connect with all public, keeping in mind residents who do not use social media. Work was being carried out and on-going. NH Now and E-Bulletin Service offered and would provide stats from engagement at the next meeting. Content, such as animations, graphics, videos, and the Council was looking to engage a new Digital Engagement Officer. Thinking this would be essential on social media, create videos and campaigns. Free up time for the PR section. Improving the website actively to update it – web chat, find information when adding their postcode, who is your Councillor, bin collection day and other information.
- Regarding the Social Media Strategy and Policy: On website as guidance for the public as to the Council's role is to make them aware will not respond on Bank Holidays and weekends.

The following Members asked questions, which were answered by Sarah Kingsley, Communications Manager, and Jo Dufficy, Customer Service Manager:

- o Councillor Cathryn Henry
- o Councillor Sam Collins
- o Councillor Elizabeth Denis-Harburg
- o Councillor Helen Oliver
- o Councillor Steve Jarvis
- o Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn
- o Councillor Gerald Morris

The Chairman suggested that the Officers create and review the action plan and present it to a future meeting.

The following Members asked questions on the above:-

- o Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg
- o Councillor Ben Lewis
- o Councillor Cathryn Henry
- o Councillor Ian Moody
- o Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn
- o Councillor Steve Jarvis

RESOLVED:

The Committee recommended:

- i. That Cabinet adopts the North Hertfordshire District Council Communications Strategy 2019-2023, as attached as Appendix A; and
- ii. Agrees the delegation for creating the Action Plan and the annual review of the Action Plan contained in the Communications Strategy, to the Communications Manager in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Council's Communications Team to carry out a programme of relevant communications activities, in line with an agreed strategic approach, ensuring residents and other stakeholders are well informed about the work of the Council and about relevant activities in the District.

58 PRESENTATION BY THE SERVICE DIRECTOR - COMMERCIAL

Audio Recording 1.58.56

The Service Director – Commercial delivered a Power point presentation on his service area.

OVERVIEW:

Task in Finishing Group in 2015: Recommendations from that:-

- 1 Senior Commercial Manager now in place.
- 2 Opportunity to have a high level Commercial Board involvement with Councillors, Officers etc., and their Shareholders Sub-Committee which is set-up. Create a Commercial Group of Officers to be involved in commercial opportunities going forward.
- 3 Pursuing and looking at income generation – this would be the emphasis and to ensure that the rest of the Council also pursue this focus. I do not have a full team as yet.
- 4 Exploring the possibility of property investments. We have already completed some research previously by Sub-Committee regarding Buy To Let and that demonstrated within this area margins are fairly low. Currently looking at assets we have and to improve on those assets to then generate income through them.
- 5 Using experts and strategic partners.
- 6 Commenced considering assets specifically within Harkness Court and Town Lodge and in consultation with our Estates Manager prepared a list of assets and want to work through. Resources lacking at present. Currently looking at Harkness Court aim is to enhance that facility and then to use to let out or to sell.
- 7 Training programs for Officers and Senior Managers. Senior Commercial Manager working with the Learning Development Team putting together, from Councillors to shop floor, appropriate training. Key that training is specific to the Local Government, as cannot operate the same as the Public Sector we do need to comply with Acts.
- 8 Scheme to recognise Officers. Best way to progress this action with some sort of incentive, without it being a monetary value incentive.

The following Members asked questions and these were responded by Steve Crowley, Service Director Commercial:-

- o Councillor Steve Jarvis
- o Councillor Michael Muir
- o Councillor Ian Moody
- o Councillor Martin Stears-Handscorn
- o Councillor Jean Green

New Structure:

Two in post. The Commercial Manager was a new role and would be looked at internally. Graded and put out to recruit in January 2019 and to interview in February 2019.

Culture:

Council should adopt this as a whole and works to engage and be involved with informal meetings, intranet page for ideas put forward, good involvement from staff briefing. Commercial Support Officers would attend and engage at the right level and to provide good communication.

The Team would be attending all Service Level Meetings.

Results of Staff Briefing held, improving how we do business and utilise our green space – outdoor cinema, mini Pop concert, Beer Festival, Fitness classes, other departments as well i.e. coffee mornings, ideas box, a couple of months ago.

Solar Energy bigger project of a Solar Farm significant investment and have to near a grid, if too small not a good return. Smaller version of a Solar Energy Farm, as other Councils have completed, but smaller schemes are for social value only.

Contractor discussions on purpose built swimming pool or gym offer, fitness market where there is opportunities for pop up studios, than have proper purpose studios, and can have returns if completed correctly.

Company name has been agreed and needs to be registered and then will be launched. Name to be confirmed. Sixty ideas for names and 250 responses back, so good engagement with our staff so a very positive step. Aim to trade by March 2019. Realistically only once first project is complete either let out or sold.

Commercial Strategy:

First draft went to PLP where it was well received. Updating that and would be returning back in January 2019 and then taken to Cabinet for adoption.

The following Members asked questions and these were responded by Steve Crowley, Service Director - Commercial :-

- o Councillor Sam Collins
- o Councillor Helen Oliver
- o Councillor Steve Jarvis
- o Councillor Michael Muir

59 2018/19 QUARTER 2 PI Data

Audio Recording 1.53.48

Due to the length of the meeting the item was deferred. Any questions, that were not urgent or exceptional, or comments required, Members were requested to email Hilary Dineen, Acting Committee and Member Services Manager or Rachel Cooper, Controls, Risk & Performance Manager direct.

60 2ND QUARTER MONITORING REPORT ON KEY PROJECTS FOR 2018-19

Audio Recording 1.53.48

Due to the length of the meeting the Item was deferred. Any questions, that were not urgent or exceptional, or comments the Committee were requested to email Hilary Dineen, Acting Committee and Member Services Manager or Rachel Cooper, Controls, Risk & Performance Manager direct.

61 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio Recoding 2.37.25

Answers were provided.

Councillor Sam Collins wished it to be recorded that:

The response did not fully clarify the actual action at St. Albans. A motion was passed for £50,000 fighting fund and other local authorities would be approached to contribute. Hitchin highlighted as another bad train station, and that the Councils needed to discuss what to do next on Great Northern Line. North Herts needs to have awareness of this.

62 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio Recording 2.41.14

This item was not discussed by the Committee.

63 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

Audio Recording 2.41.14

This item was not discussed by the Committee.

64 Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 10.15 pm

Chairman