

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2018 – 2019

1. Overview and Scrutiny in North Hertfordshire District Council

1.1 The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has to use its resources efficiently in order to scrutinise as many topics as possible in the time available. It does so by:

- Considering a number of issues during its Committee meetings and making recommendations to Cabinet;
- Appointing dedicated task and finish groups which can examine issues in depth and make recommendations to improve services;

1.2 This year, the Committee has undertaken two training courses delivered by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, to further enhance their effective scrutiny methods and skills.

2. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 There were six scheduled meetings this year at which the Committee considered a range of topics including scrutinising key decisions going to Cabinet, checking whether the Council has met its performance indicators as well as reviewing other issues which the Committee has decided would benefit from closer scrutiny.

2.2 The Committee can scrutinise issues in a number of ways:

- By considering reports from, and questioning officers about different aspects of the Council's business;
- By submitting written questions which require a written answer, and which members can follow up by asking supplementary questions in Committee;
- By interviewing and questioning Cabinet Members about their portfolios;
- By calling in decisions which are of great concern to members or to the public;
- By inviting representatives from outside bodies to talk about topics of interest to the public in North Hertfordshire.

2.3 Call-In

2.3.1 The call in process allows the Chairman of the Committee, or five members of the Council, to call in a decision which is the responsibility of the Executive, which has been made but not implemented. The Committee can ask the Executive to reconsider it or can refer it to Council.

2.3.2 There have been no called in items this year.

2.4 Presentations by Executive Members

2.4.1 The Committee continued with its decision taken in the previous year, not to invite Executive Members to speak on their portfolios on a rolling basis and to instead invite them only to address specific issues or to present reports that were of interest to the Committee. The Committee are grateful to the following Executive Member for making presentations this year:

- Councillor Michael Weeks

2.5 Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

- 2.5.1 The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year. The Committee was grateful to Chief Inspector Sally Phillips and Inspector Richard Lilley of Hertfordshire Constabulary who attended the Committee in January to talk about the work of the police in the district. CI Sally Phillips is newly appointed to her role in Neighbourhood Policing across North Hertfordshire, as the successor to the position from CI Julie Wheatley.

2.6 Safeguarding

- 2.6.1 The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and received its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in December 2018.

2.7 Statistics

- 2.7.1 In total, the Committee has considered 26 items in its meetings this year. It has made 9 recommendations on 4 topics to Cabinet. Where the Committee supported the recommendations no onward recommendations were made to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made and the work programme.
- 2.7.2 One written question was asked by Members during the year. This question was raised and answered in the December Committee and related to whether the Council was in support of St Albans Council, who was setting up a legal fund for challenging the local train operator in response to the poor train service received in parts of the district.
- 2.7.3 A response to a previously submitted written question, relating to the identification of access problems to new developments, was provided during the December Committee.

3. Task and Finish Groups in 2018/19

- 3.1 Task and finish groups are an opportunity for members to scrutinise a topic in much more depth than is possible in a single Committee meeting. They recommend improvements to the Council's performance which are then considered by Cabinet.
- 3.2 In line with the decision by the Committee in the previous year, task and finish groups remained on hold until Member training, and a workshop with Cabinet had taken place. The intended outcome of these sessions was to identify how best the Committee could fulfil its role as a critical friend and support Cabinet in their decision making.

3.3 The Centre for Public Scrutiny was approached as the national centre of expertise on governance and scrutiny and they delivered two training sessions tailored to the Committee's requirements. The first of these sessions took place in December and focussed on the essentials of effective scrutiny. The session received good feedback from the 10 members in attendance.

3.4 A workshop between Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet Members was then held in February 2019. The workshop identified ways to develop joint working between the committees in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny function.

3.5 Following completion of the training session, during the March Committee, members made the decision that task and finish groups could now recommence on basis of members feeling more confident in the relationship between Cabinet and the Overview & Scrutiny committee.

4. Future Task and Finish Groups

4.1 The Committee has prioritised the following topics for 2018/19:

- The Waste contract

4.2 Alongside the planned task and finish group, the Committee began a scrutiny review into the Hitchin Town Hall/ District Wide Museum project, which is on-going, with recommendations planned to be brought to their September 2019 Committee.

5. Public Participation

5.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.

5.2 Approximately 29 members of the public attended the Committee's meetings this year.

5.3 Some of the ways for the public to get involved include suggesting a topic for investigation as a task and finish group; providing evidence to or at a meeting; and being co-opted on to a topic group. The Committee is keen to see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

6. Further Information and Membership

6.1 Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found at:

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-anddemocracy/overview-and-scrutiny-committee>

6.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2018 – 2019

Members of the Committee

Councillor Cathryn Henry (Chairman)
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Ian Albert
Councillor Kate Aspinwall
Councillor Sam Collins
Councillor Steve Deakin-Davies
Councillor Jean Green
Councillor Steve Jarvis
Councillor Ben Lewis
Councillor Gerald Morris
Councillor Ian Moody
Councillor Michael Muir
Councillor Helen Oliver
Councillor Janine Paterson
Councillor Valentine Shanley
Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb

Substitutes

Councillor Ruth Brown
Councillor Val Bryant
Councillor Bill Davidson
Councillor Simon Harwood
Councillor Terry Hone
Councillor Sue Ngwala
Councillor Mike Rice