

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES,
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON TUESDAY, 19TH MARCH, 2019 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), Kirstie Wilson (Temporary Scrutiny Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

77 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ian Albert and Steve Jarvis.

Having given due notice Councillor Val Bryant advised that she would be substituting for Councillor Albert.

78 MINUTES - 22 JANUARY 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2019 were tabled,

To allow time for Members to read the Minutes they would be formally agreed at the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 22 January 2019 be formally approved at the next meeting of this Committee.

79 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

80 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman thanked all who attended this meeting.
- (2) The Chairman asked Members and speakers to speak into the microphones.
- (3) The Chairman reminded everyone that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded.
- (4) The Chairman advised that Item 13 - Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Item 14 - Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2018/19 would be considered immediately following Item 8 - Members' Questions.

- (5) The Chairman drew attention to the agenda front pages 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 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest.

81 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no presentations by members of the public.

82 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

No urgent or general exception items were received.

83 CALLED-IN ITEMS

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

84 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been submitted.

85 Q3 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled Q3 Performance Indicators and drew attention to the following:

BV 12a - Working days lost due to short-term sickness absence per FTE employee

Absence was reported by Service Area to make it easier for Managers to monitor

The projection for year end was that this would increase to 4.15 days absence per FTE

In response to a question from Councillor Morris she advised that sickness was looked at in a lot of detail. HR considered the wellbeing of staff. The highest level of sickness was in the Place and Customer Service Director areas.

LI 034 - Percentage of Environmental Health programmed inspections completed

This was identified as red in Q2, was amber this quarter and continued to improve.

NI 157ai - Percentage of major planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods

This was cross referenced with the number of appeals and refunds (of which there were none to date). The details appeared on the full report that had been emailed to Members one month before this meeting.

NI 157e - Percentage of all planning applications determined within the relevant statutory or agreed time periods

The Planning Team were now up to full staffing levels and this was improving.

Members commented that Planning was always a balance between hitting deadlines and negotiating to get a good application.

Members asked for information regarding what constituted “others” in this target

Data with No Targets

In response to a question from Councillor Aspinwall, The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager advised that the full report had all of the targets and the Committee had elected to receive an exception report showing red and amber information only.

The data around Homelessness had no target and it had been agreed that no target would be set for the first year for food and garden waste.

NI 192 - Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting

This was identified as amber, with paper recycling having seen an 11 percent fall. It should be noted that this was a National trend and the introduction of the chargeable garden waste contact has had an effect on recycling levels.

Performance Reporting

Members noted that the full performance report was sent to Members of the Committee one month before each meeting and that an exception report was considered at the meetings.

It was for Members to review the full report and advise the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager of any items that they would like further detail presented at the meeting. If they wished for a specific Officer or Executive Member to be at the meeting they should contact the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Q3 Performance Indicators be noted;
- (2) That the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager be requested to investigate what constitutes “Others” in respect of NI 157e and advise Members of this Committee of her findings.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor Performance Indicators.

86 NEW YEAR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS TO BE MONITORED

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled New Year Performance Indicators to Be Monitored and drew attention to the following:

Target Setting

Targets were set by Officers and Executive Members and approved by Cabinet following consideration by this Committee.

Targets were SMART rather than aspirational.

NI 191 - Kg residual waste per Household & NI 192 - Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting

Members recognised that targets should be achievable, but felt that the proposed targets were not ambitious enough.

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager advised that targets in previous years had rarely been met and they had been identified as amber each year.

Following detailed discussion, Members requested that, prior to the Cabinet meeting, the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager identify the outturn figure for the last 3 years and that:

- If the trend was downwards then the Committee recommended a target for NI 192 that was in the middle of the last three years outturn figures or
- If the trend was upwards the the Committee recommended a target for NI 192 that was one percent above the highest outturn figure.

LI035a - Number of households living in temporary accommodation

REG1 Rate of homelessness prevention N/A – Data

REG2 Rate of homelessness relief

Members were advised that Homelessness data had been collected in a different way since April and there was potential that benchmarking data could be available by the end of the year.

BV9 - Percentage of council tax collected in year

Members debated this indicator in some depth. They noted that collection rates had historically been high although were concerned about the potential impact of Universal Credit on collection rates.

They were informed that a policy was being drawn up regarding debt collection and asked that this Committee have sight of this document at an early stage.

They also requested a report regarding the impact of Universal Credit, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and other benefits.

They agreed that the target should be reviewed mid year in order to take into account the effect of Universal Credit on collection rates.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, prior to the Cabinet meeting, the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager be requested to identify the outturn figure for the last 3 years.
- (2) That the Service Director – Customers be requested to present the planned policy on debt collection to this Committee at an early stage of development.
- (3) That the Service Director - Customers be requested to present a report regarding the impact of Universal Credit, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and other benefits to this Committee

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That, in respect of NI 192, based on the figures identified from resolution (1) above:
 - If the trend was downwards then the Committee recommends a target for NI 192 that is in the middle of the last three years outturn figures or
 - If the trend was upwards then the Committee recommends a target for NI 192 that is one percent above the highest outturn figure;

NB: Following the meeting outturn figures regarding NI 192 for years 2015/16, 2016/17 and 2017/18. These figures are attached to the referral to Cabinet.

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- (2) That, in respect of LI035a, REG1 and REG2, Cabinet be requested to set targets as soon as data is available;
- (3) That, in respect of BV9, the target be reviewed mid year in order to take into account the effect of Universal Credit on collection rates.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the report entitled New Year Performance Indicators to be Monitored prior to consideration by Cabinet.

87 Q3 UPDATE ON PROJECTS IN THE CORPORATE PLAN

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled Q3 Update on Projects In the Corporate Plan and associated appendices

In respect of the waste contract, Members expressed concern at the lack of detail provided, which made it difficult to assess whether there had been improvements. They felt that the lessons learnt log was more of a commentary than a list of lessons learnt.

They considered that the proposed review of the waste contract should look at why the East Herts side of the contact went well, whilst the North Herts side did not. They also considered that the Executive Member for Waste at East Herts should be asked to give evidence.

Members asked that a Panel be formed in readiness and that it should be identified which Group should chair this review.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Q3 Update on Projects in the Corporate Plan be noted:
- (2) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to ask Group Leaders for nomination to a Task and Finish Group review of the Waste Contract;
- (3) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to identify which Group should chair the next Task and Finish Group review

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable achievements against the key projects for 2018/19 to be considered.

88 NEW YEAR - KEY PROJECTS TO BE MONITORED FOR 19/20

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled New Year – Key Projects to be Monitored for 19/20

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the key projects to be monitored, subject to capacity, that will be the key focus for the Council 2019/20.

REASON FOR DECISION: The Corporate Business Planning Timetable requires the key projects to be considered by this Committee. In addition, this Committee has a role in monitoring the delivery of these projects.

89 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:

Minute 32 – July 17 – Work Programme

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The requested training regarding scrutiny had now taken place.

Members feedback on this training was:

- It had been very useful;
- Members now felt more confident in their role;
- It had been good to compare practices of Overview and Scrutiny Committees from other Councils;
- It was good to share best practice;
- It highlighted the work still to be done;
- It was useful to have Members of the Cabinet present.

Members felt that Task and Finish Groups should now be recommenced, however Cabinet needed to accept recommendations in the spirit of O&S being a critical friend.

Members expressed concern that they received reports far too late in the process and that the Committee could be more constructive as a critical friend if they were able to consider proposals at a much earlier stage so that they could influence and give support, rather than at a point when the proposal was all but complete and unable to be amended in any meaningful way.

Members considered that, other than the planned review regarding Hitchin Town Hall, a review of the Waste Contract Implementation should be scheduled.

Members asked that the waste collection routes be sent to them as soon as possible.

Minute 28 – July 18 – Work Programme

Members expressed disappointment that the planned meeting regarding the Communications Strategy had not yet taken place and asked that this be arranged as soon as possible

Minute 37 – September 18 – Waste Contract

Members asked that Service Manager – Waste be requested to complete the actions in respect of a Communications Strategy for Waste as detailed in Resolution 37 (4)

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Resolution of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (2) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to schedule a review of the Waste Contract Implementation and draw up a draft scope upon completion of the SIAS audit;
- (3) That the Service Manager- Waste be requested to send details of the waste collection routes to all Members of the Committee;
- (4) That the Communications Manager be requested to continue to arrange the planned meeting to discuss the Communications Strategy;
- (5) That the Service Manager – Waste be requested to complete the actions in respect of a Communications Strategy for Waste as detailed in Resolution 37 (4) – September 2018.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to monitor actions following resolutions made at previous meetings.

90 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

The Temporary Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme for 2018/19 and drew attention to the following:

Work Programme Reports

It was disappointing that the Committee had not considered this report for three consecutive meetings. The Committee could not plan its workload if it did not consider the options.

Members asked that, once a decision had been made regarding whether NHDC would appeal against the Planning decision regarding the proposed Crematorium, this be scheduled into the work programme

Review of Hitchin Town Hall

The Committee considered a paper regarding this at a previous meeting.

Two candidates for Independent Chair of the review had been interviewed and John Richardson had been identified as the most suitable candidate.

Group Leaders had nominated candidates to act as the Panel to this review.

There was some discussion that Members of the Panel not only had to act fairly and non-politically, but had to be seen to do so and that Members of the Panel will need to avoid bias and look for a useful outcome.

The next step was for the Panel to meet and discuss the scope of the review and set dates for meetings.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2018/19 be noted;
- (2) That the Committee endorses the appointment of John Richardson as Independent Chair of the Review of Hitchin Town Hall in line with the appointment process agreed in January's Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- (3) That the Committee endorse the appointment of Councillors Sam Collins, Ian Moody, Helen Oliver and Val Shanley as the Panel to undertake the Review of the Hitchin Town Hall in line with the appointment process agreed in January's Overview & Scrutiny Committee;
- (4) That the Scrutiny Officer be requested to organise an initial meeting of the Hitchin Town Hall Review Panel to discuss the scope of the review and arrange meeting dates.
- (5) That, the proposed Crematorium be placed on the Committee's Work Programme.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to set the Work programme.

91 OUTGOING CHAIRMAN

The Committee offered formal thanks to Councillor Cathryn Henry for her work as Chairman of the Committee..

RESOLVED: That Councillor Cathryn Henry be thanked for her work as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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The meeting closed at 9.50 pm

Chairman