

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 22  
MARCH 2022, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor J Wyllie (Chairman)  
Councillors R Buckmaster, A Curtis,  
I Devonshire, H Drake, J Frecknall,  
M Goldspink, D Hollebon, D Snowdon and  
N Symonds

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors G Cutting, J Kaye and P Ruffles

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Jess Khanom- Metaman	- Head of Operations
Jeanette Lowden	- Contracts Manager
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic Services Manager
Ben Wood	- Head of

Communications,  
Strategy and  
Policy

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Michael Francis	- Hertfordshire County Council
Cindy Withey	- Dacorum CVS

383 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Bell, Councillor Stevenson and Councillor Ward-Booth. It was noted that Councillor Kemp was substituting for Councillor Ward-Booth.

384 MINUTES - 18 JANUARY 2022

Councillor Curtis proposed and Councillor Snowdon seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

385 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said that with the consent of the

Committee, the presentations regarding Digital Exclusion could be brought forward on the agenda and delivered before the Street Cleansing Contract Performance report.

The Chairman stated that the Head of Housing and Health would update Members in respect of the Rapid Review of Affordable Housing before the presentations on Digital Exclusion.

386 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Goldspink declared an interest in respect of the Street Cleansing Contract Performance report, in that she lived on a road where there were a lot of trees.

387 FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME - RAPID REVIEW OF HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

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The Head of Housing and Health reported that he had discussed the matter of the proposed Rapid Review of Affordable Housing with a number of Members from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He assured Members that Officers understood the importance that Members place upon the provision of social housing with lower rents.

The Head of Housing and Health went on to point out that the provision of more housing with social rents is the first objective under the first priority in the draft Housing Strategy to be put to Council on 11 May 2022. Furthermore, the Strategy itself had drawn on independent research commissioned by the council

and conducted by the Housing Quality Network. The research put forward the scope of the council to facilitate more homes for social rent. The Head of Housing and Health noted that a number of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny had input to this research and the drafting of the Housing Strategy and so have been instrumental in shaping the council's work on affordable housing to date.

The Head of Housing and Health commented that when the proposal of a Rapid Review was initially raised by Members they were expecting the Housing Strategy to be considered at the Council meeting on 1 March 2022, however, as it has now be moved to the 11 May 2022, commencing a review might be premature and he and other Officers were keen to ensure the best use of Members, Officers and partners' time on this topic.

The Head of Housing and Health explained that, pending approval of the Housing Strategy by Council, Officers will draw up a detailed action plan covering how best to increase the supply of homes for social rent which would have been the focus of the proposed Rapid Review. He suggested that in place of conducted a Rapid Review, a report could be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September which would afford Members an opportunity to scrutinise the action plan in as much detail as Members would like.

Councillor Goldspink expressed her disappointment at what she felt was a delay in addressing the issue of more providing more homes for social rent as she was concerned about the difficulties experienced by people

on the housing register. She asked why the Housing Strategy had been delayed in submission to Council in May and to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September.

The Head of Housing and Health replied that he understood this was to ensure that the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods could be present to introduce the strategy and address any questions Members wished to raise.

Councillor Curtis said that one of the objectives of the Council was to maximise the opportunity for residents to own their own property. He talked about the remit of the action plan and sought assurance that all options would be considered. The Head of Housing and Health said that the draft Housing Strategy contained a number of objectives and each objective would include an action plan. The Strategy included enabling access to a wider range of housing tenures.

Councillor Snowdon proposed and Councillor R Buckmaster seconded, a motion that a report presenting the action plan for promoting more housing for social rent be submitted to the 20 September 2022 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the submission of the Housing Strategy to Council in May 2022.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED. Councillor Goldspink asked that her abstention from voting be recorded.

**RESOLVED** – that a report presenting the action

plan for promoting more housing for social rent be submitted to the 20 September 2022 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the submission of the Housing Strategy to Council in May 2022.

### 388 DIGITAL EXCLUSION

The Executive Member for Corporate Services and the Executive Member for Community Engagement jointly submitted a report that invited Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee to put forward their views and inform policy direction in respect of the Council's approach to Digital Exclusion.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said some words of introduction in respect to the presentations. He said that the topic of digital inclusion had come up at meetings since the Autumn of 2021 and in particular, as the Corporate Plan had made its way through Council. He mentioned the theme in the Corporate Plan of digital by default and said that he hoped that the discussions and debate would lead to some ideas and thoughts that could be fed back to the Executive.

Mr Michael Francis, Head of Customer and Digital Inclusion at Hertfordshire County Council, gave a presentation in respect of digital by default and ways the County had been supporting communities with digital inclusion. Members asked a number of questions following the presentation and Mr Francis responded.

Ms Cindy Withey, Dacorum Community Voluntary Service and Community Action Dacorum gave a presentation in respect of the Hertfordshire wide digital inclusion project aimed at addressing difficulties experienced by communities in Hertfordshire in terms of digital poverty and its detrimental impact on the health of residents. She talked about the funding and success of the project and the four main barriers that had been identified by their project. Members asked a number of questions and Ms Withey responded.

Councillor Kemp commented on areas where people may struggle to interact with the digital world. He touched on the risks of scams and the groups of people who chose not to engage with the digital world for reasons of trust or for whom it would be unwise to do so. He emphasised the importance of catering for these residents and he cited two cases where he had been contacted by residents who had been unable to contact the Council by phone in the last month.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy invited Councillor Kemp to share the details of those incidents with him. He talked about the impact of the pandemic and said that there were now fewer numbers of staff to take calls. Members were advised that call answer rates had been under pressure for a while and more phone calls were being received and the queries being raised were now taking longer to resolve.

The Executive Member for Corporate Services acknowledged the observations of Councillor Kemp. He said that the staffing issue was a matter of concern

and the matter was being addressed by the Head of Service. He talked about the difficulties of recruiting staff trained in call centre etiquette and reassured Members that everything that could be done was being done.

The Executive Member for Corporate Services said that the objective was to encourage as many people as possible to interact digitally with the Council and purchase services. He said that the Council would always provide a service to those who could not use digital media.

The Executive Member for Corporate Services said that the Council would always be available for those residents who preferred not to interact with the Authority by digital means. Councillor Curtis commented that it would be helpful to have metrics which would provide a snapshot of the requests that were being submitted online.

The Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy said that the Council was looking to consolidate the multiple systems that were relied upon by customer services when answering queries from the public. He said that the chances of a single system being out of action were quite high, resulting in significant frustration for customers. Members were advised that Officers were looking to resolve on going telephony issues.

Councillor Goldspink proposed and Councillor R Buckmaster seconded a motion that a policy objective should be that, whilst the Council was encouraging as



many people as possible to use online services, the Council should permanently make allowances and arrangements for people who were not able to access digital services and that the Executive should be advised of this.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

Councillor Wyllie proposed and Councillor R Buckmaster seconded a motion that that Officers look into the potential for maximising the number of digital interactions and maximising the use of e-accounts. The Head of Service provide metrics detailing online activities and a conversation be had regarding phone systems going forward and that Officers progress the introduction of a centralised CRM system.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that (A) the Executive be advised that there should be a policy objective that, whilst the Council was encouraging as many people as possible to use online services, the Council should permanently make allowance and arrangements for people who were not able to access digital services; and

(B) Officers look into the potential for maximising the number of digital interactions and maximising the use of e-accounts. The Head of Service provide metrics detailing online activities and a conversation be had regarding

phone systems going forward and Officers progress the introduction of a centralised CRM system.

### 389 STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT PERFORMANCE

The Head of Operations submitted a report that provided an overview of the performance of street cleansing activities delivered by contractors on behalf of East Herts Council. She introduced and welcomed Jeanette Lowden, Client Side Contract Manager, to the meeting and advised that this report had been submitted to Members following a direct request from the Committee.

The Head of Operations said that the report outlined methodology and current performance. She said that the report also acknowledged some of the challenges being faced by the Council as well as highlighting some of the areas for improvement that the authority needed to take forward.

Members were advised that traditionally there would be a contract renewal task and finish group as there was now a joint waste service. The Head of Operations said that the recommendation moving forward was for a joint cross party Member working group to be established to look at contract specification in terms of design.

Councillor Goldspink asked who had the contract for cleaning parks and open spaces and also asked how

decisions were made in respect of how many litter bins and dog waste bins were provided.

Councillor Goldspink asked who was responsible for unblocking drains and gulleys and also asked if there was more the Council could do to help community groups who swept up autumn leaves in their own roads, perhaps by collecting up and disposing of all the bags of leaves which had been swept up.

Councillor Goldspink asked if the street cleaners and the staff responsible for waste collections were interchangeable. The Head of Operations said that Grounds Maintenance was carried out by Glendale Environmental Services as part of a separate contract. She advised that Hertfordshire County Council carried out the clearance of drains and gullies.

The Head of Operations said that an assessment based approach was taken where requests were made for an additional street bin or a new parks and open spaces. She said that there were inconsistencies in relation to the two contracts in respect of grounds maintenance and waste. Members were advised that a bin infrastructure audit had been carried out and the Council now needed to have streamlined principles in terms of litter and bin collections.

The Head of Operations acknowledged that behaviours had changed and more people were now using parks and open spaces. She said that Members were being asked to join Officers in working out what a future contract should look like. Members were advised that services needed to be more streamlined and a holistic

approach needed to be taken.

The Head of Operations referred to campaign work whereby the public were being encouraged to take litter home. The Contract Manager said that leaf fall could be placed in garden waste bins and leaf clearance was carried out in flood prone roads as part of the normal cleansing cycles. She advised that these roads were inspected each year and any roads particularly susceptible to leaf fall would be added to an additional cleanse if this was required. Members were reminded that leaf clearance had been removed from the street cleansing contract in 2010.

The Contract Manager said that the Council did assist local community groups with litter picking events and this waste would have been treated as general street detritus and disposed of as such. She referred to the "adopt an area" service and encouraged residents to visit the website.

The Head of Operations said that not all Officers were multi skilled and interchangeable due to the different vehicle licences that were required. She said that Officers were redeployed where possible and the main priority would always be residential bin collections over street cleansing.

Councillor Devonshire referred to page 47 of the report and a HEAT map of street inspections. He asked if the Council could concentrate on the five or six areas to achieve Grade B or above. The Contract Manager explained that areas Graded B or below by Contract Officers who carried out inspections, were raised with

the contractor to be rectified and brought back to the expected standard within a specified timescale. She explained the purpose of the HEAT map and the reasons for clusters on the map. Members were given an explanation regarding the timings of inspections and the grading.

Councillor Wyllie, on behalf of Councillor Bell, asked how the waste collection service tracked missed bins which could cause bins to overflow on a regular basis in some areas. He further mentioned on her behalf that some Parish Councils were willing to empty these bins when they are missed but would want assurances that the Council would collect them at a later point.

The Head of Operations said that with regard to missed bin collections on street, the Council relied upon Contract Officers and the public to report this. She said a new initiative was a "hot spot" list for East Herts bins and this would feed into the performance management regime. Members were advised that it was important that Parish Councils continued to report issues so that the Council could redress the matter.

Councillor Wyllie, on behalf of Councillor Crystall, asked if the Head of Service received feedback or interaction from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) about the impact of street cleaning on the drainage system and what could be done to improve services. The Head of Operations said that she and Waste Officers had met with HCC on a regular basis and nothing had specifically been raised to date in respect of drainage systems. She said that this matter would be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Councillor Hollebon expressed concern about the cleansing of footways and alleyways in her ward. She also said that litter and dead weeds were appalling in all of the footpaths around Thorley. The Head of Operations asked her to provide further information so that she could investigate.

Councillor Hollebon said that she agreed with the suggestion whereby the contractors and local Members worked together to decide on the grading. She emphasised the importance of picking up litter before grass was cut as the litter was sprayed on to grass verges.

The Head of Operations asked for specific details to be passed onto Officers in respect of Thorley. She said that meetings were taking place more regularly with HCC and the ultimate goal was for litter picking to be carried out before grass verge cutting.

Councillor Curtis asked how the high, medium and low intensity of use performance zones had been determined as detailed in table one on page 37 of the report. He talked about the laborious nature of the customer complaints process and asked if Members could see a HEAT map of the frequency of where street inspections had been undertaken.

The Head of Operations said that the contract included an appendix that classified every part of the District and that was mainly based upon footfall. She said that Officers could give Members examples of where high and low performance areas were located in the

District. She said that grades A and B could be disaggregated as suggested by Councillor Curtis.

Councillor Curtis commented on the need to be conscious of the spatial basis that had been applied on the HEAT map. He said that there might be areas that were not shown on the map as they had not been checked very often or at all. The Contract Manager said that Zone One where main shopping areas were inspected on a weekly basis. She said that the outer regions were inspected on the basis of the NI195 inspections, whereby each road or path in East Herts was inspected at least once over the course of a year.

Councillor R Buckmaster asked how often inspections were carried out on sections of a road that were Grade D in terms of how often post clean detritus inspections were carried out. The Contract Manager invited Members to contact her directly regarding detritus in the street.

Councillor Drake asked if there could be greater frequency of inspection and collection in quarter one of the year if residents were generating more litter in quarter one. She commented on the trial of larger wheeled bins in laybys and asked if bins with a smaller opening could be trialled to cater for wrappers of items eaten in a layby. She asked if slightly larger bins could be provided in parks to ensure that waste from fish and chips or packed lunches could fit into the bin.

Councillor Drake expressed the need for caution around changing the location of bins without carefully looking at the data in terms of size and amount of

waste that went into a particular bin. She commented on the safety element of leaves in wet weather and asked if there was more cleansing in wet weather or did this take place irrespective of whether or not it had not rained.

The Head of Operations said that the bin audit looked at the frequency of collections, the location and size of bins. She said that there needed to be a lot more consistency in the approach being taken by the Council.

The Contract Manager said that in quarter one and quarter four, the Council did see more litter and detritus building up and more complaints were reported to the Council at those times. She commented on the misuse of bins during the trial in laybys and the alternative options being considered by Officers. She asked that Members contact Officers if there were particular areas of concern.

Councillor Kemp touched on the issue of leaf fall and the clearance of slippery pathways between estates. The Contract Manager asked if Members could provide with her information so that Officers could look into problems of this nature.

Councillor Curtis proposed and Councillor Devonshire seconded, a motion that the comments made by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the review of performance of the street cleaning contract be passed on to the Executive.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the



motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that the comments made by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the review of performance of the street cleaning contract be passed on to the Executive.

390 WASTE SHARED SERVICE GOVERNANCE REPORT

The Head of Operations submitted a report inviting Members to consider options around the governance of the Waste Shared Service, in order to support future partnership working and service resilience.

The Head of Operations set out the history of the Waste Shared Service with North Herts Council and said that a joint contract had been awarded to Urbaser in May 2018. She stated that the Council had looked at a number of issues to achieve savings.

The Head of Operations said that the time had come to look at contract renewal and one of the key elements of the service review led by the Waste Shared Service Manager was the in relation to efficiencies. She said that the next contract needed to ensure to ensure that services were more aligned and administration functions needed to be slicker and more efficient.

Members were advised that a key element of the governance going forward was how joint decisions were made across the two authorities. The Head of Operations said that North Herts had agreed to a chargeable garden waste service and reminded Members that East Herts had introduced this in

January 2021.

Members were advised that the aim of the report was to seek permission to explore what joint decision making might look like to reduce risks whilst ensuring that each authority had the independence to act in the interests of the two authorities.

The Head of Operations said that the recommendation included the setting up of a cross party joint Member working group to consider what the design of the new service specification could look like for the next contract.

Councillor Goldspink expressed her view about how different the two Councils were in terms of standards and the charges. She said that she was fully supportive of the recommendation for a working party to bring the two Councils closer together.

Councillor Wyllie read out the pre submitted question from Councillor Drake in terms of whether more could be done regarding refuse collection and improving communication between the Council and residents, for example by letting residents know (via text), that their refuse might be collected on a different date if, for example, some works were being undertaken in a road which would impact on the ability of the Council to collect on a normal basis.

The Head of Operations said that she had discussed this with the Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy and there would be a further discussion as to what could be done in terms of communication. She

said that there currently was no text message service and sometimes emails were sent out regarding the brown bin service collection. Members were advised that subject to financial constraints, Officers would explore options of what could be brought with the shared service going forward.

The Head of Operations referred to the topic of social media and the website being updated as the standard means of communication platforms. She said that the matter of specific customised text messages would need to be explored a bit further.

Councillor Snowdon said that looking back to the matter of digital by default; it was a matter of minimising the need for residents to phone the Council when a problem needed immediate attention. He commented on the importance of problem mitigation and the possibility of financial savings.

Councillor Curtis proposed and Councillor Goldspink seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to the Executive that it endorsed the formation of a joint cross party working group and Overview and Scrutiny support the proposal to explore the future options for governance of the Shared Waste Service, including consideration of a joint committee consisting of representation by both East Herts Council and North Herts Council.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that (A) Overview and Scrutiny

Committee recommend that the Executive endorse the formation of a joint cross party working group; and

(B) the proposal to explore the future options for governance of the Shared Waste Service, including consideration of a joint Committee consisting of representation by both East Herts Council and North Herts Council, be supported.

391 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME  
2022/23

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The Scrutiny Officer drew Members' attention to the appendix had been populated with some items for Members consideration in terms of what they might wish to scrutinise during the 2022/23 civic year. She said that Members were being invited to give feedback about topics and the timeframes following a recent refresh of the corporate plan.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that Members might have seen the proposals included a lot of items for discussion. He said that it was not the intention for there to be a lot of items for discussion and it was for Members to consider whether they were interested in looking into these topics or whether there were additional topics to be added to the work programme.

Councillor Curtis made a number of comments regarding the work programme and talked about the viability of developments and the saleability of housing and the District was provided with the homes that

were needed. He talked about the investment in places and, in particular, investment outside of Hertford and Bishop's Stortford.

Members had a general discussion about the future work programme based on the debate that had been had on the matters on the agenda at this meeting. Councillor Hollebon said that she was very pleased to see that East Herts Healthy Hubs were to be relaunched in 2023.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reminded Members that the work programme was a standing item on the Agenda and discussions could be had outside of the meeting and at future meetings of the Committee. He said that the Committee should aim to know what issues they wanted to review a year and a half ahead. Members were reminded that this would also serve to facilitate the attendance of relevant Executive Members at meetings of the Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Curtis and seconded by Councillor Goldspink, that the Committee Work Programme be approved. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

**RESOLVED** – that (A) the main agenda items for the next meeting be agreed; and

(B) the Committee Work Programme be approved.

392 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.12 pm

Chairman .....

Date .....