

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 20
SEPTEMBER 2022, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor J Wyllie (Chairman)
Councillors M Brady, B Crystall, A Curtis,
I Devonshire, H Drake, M Goldspink,
I Kemp, S Rutland-Barsby, D Snowdon,
N Symonds, A Ward-Booth and C Wilson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors P Boylan, J Goodeve,
G McAndrew, T Page, M Pope, J Ranger and
G Williamson

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
Helen George	- Housing Development and Strategy Manager
Chloe Hipwood	- Service Manager - Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning

Jess Khanom-Metaman	- Head of Operations
Peter Mannings	- Democratic Services Officer
Katie Mogan	- Democratic Services Manager
Karen Page	- The Service Manager (Development Management and Enforcement)
Sara Saunders	- Head of Planning and Building Control
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

138 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Frecknall and Hollebon. It was noted that Councillor Crystall was substituting for Councillor Frecknall and Councillor Ward-Booth was substituting for Councillor Hollebon.

139 MINUTES - 21 JUNE 2022

Councillor Curtis proposed and Councillor Goldspink seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 63 – delete in 8th paragraph – ‘Castle Park Project in Hertford’.

Replace with ‘...Castle Park Project in Bishop’s Stortford’.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED. Councillor Kemp abstained from voting as he had not been present at the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2022, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:

Minute 63 – delete in 8th paragraph – ‘Castle Park project in Hertford’

Replace with ‘...Castle Park Project in Bishop’s Stortford’.

140 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Rutland-Barsby to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

141 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

142 COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2023/24

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

submitted a report inviting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the latest available information around the current local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme at East Herts and whether any changes to the scheme should be considered for 2023/24.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability reminded Members of the background to the scheme and advised that the scheme required payments of 8.5% of council tax liability instead of the 100% awarded under the previous council tax benefit schemes. He said that the proposal was to leave the scheme unchanged and one reason for this was that any changes seemed inappropriate with the way things were in respect of people's circumstances. Members were also reminded that any changes would require consultation.

Councillor Kemp said that it was very good to see that the Council had a longstanding scheme and he understood that a quarter of residents were benefiting from it. He commented that the proportion of people in the scheme paying council tax was lower than was the case for general residents.

Councillor Kemp said that a quarter of residents were paying 8.5% of the normal Council Tax. He asked what income was generated from the 8.5% over the whole base of taxpayers and how did this correlate against the costs in chasing those payers who did not pay their council tax.

Councillor Williamson said that of the 65,450 council tax paying properties in the District, 5,210 were in

receipt of council tax support which equated to just under 8%. He said that of the 5,210 around 2,300 were classified in the elderly category and were eligible to receive up to 100% support meaning that for some there was nothing to collect.

Councillor Williamson said that the costs of chasing nonpayers or those with arrears was not separately identified. He said that he would see if more information could be supplied to answer the question outside of the meeting.

Councillor Kemp asked for the figure for the proportion who were paying the 8.5%. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said that the council tax liability for working age residents in receipt of council tax support was £4.4m, therefore 8.5% would be £374k at September 2022 and this figure changed by the hour.

The Chairman asked the following pre submitted question on behalf of Councillor Brady. Can the Council Tax level in the upper bands be increased in line with the tax relief provided by the Government? The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that this was not possible as the weighting and ratios of the various council tax bands was laid down by legislation and statute.

Councillor Wilson asked if Officers had any knowledge of what happened in terms of living standards or the residential status of residents who were on universal credit where it had been agreed that a debt was to be paid by taking money out of universal credit.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said that Officers worked very closely with any resident who was in receipt of council tax support and had contacted Officers to alleviate or ameliorate their debt situation. Members were advised that the amount that could be recovered was capped to avoid causing excessive hardship and Officers worked with customers to establish a manageable and reasonable repayment schedule to alleviate any extra pressures.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said there was a small hardship fund and the number of applicants for this was increasing. Councillor Goldspink said that overall, the report had struck the right balance. Councillor Symonds expressed her thanks to Officers for doing a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances.

Councillor Devonshire proposed and Councillor Snowdon seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider that the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme should continue for 2023/24. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree that the current Council Tax Reduction Scheme should continue for 2023/24.

143 REVIEW OF POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR DELIVERING MORE HOMES AT SOCIAL RENT LEVELS

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods submitted

a report that gave Overview and Scrutiny Members sight of the first draft of the Strategic Priority 1 action plan and work carried out by Officers in consultation with various partners on potential opportunities for providing more affordable homes with lower rents.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the strategic action plan provided the context for the important work to enable, where at all possible, more homes with social rents to come forward. Members were referred to appendix two for a detailed discussion of ten potential opportunities for this to occur. The Executive Member said that some 75% of existing affordable homes for rent that were re-let in East Herts during 2021/22 had social rents rather than affordable rents.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the independent study conducted out by the Housing Quality Network in 2020, along with further analysis carried out by Officers, both showed the benefits of greater numbers of homes with social rents. He thanked Officers for their efforts in exploring this subject and said that he was committed to exploring all options for providing more homes for social rent.

Councillor Wilson said that if there was an increase in the amount of social housing compared to other types of affordable housing, there should then be fewer cases of homelessness. He asked about the relationship between the availability of social housing and the level of homelessness.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that

the causes of homelessness were numerous and complex and there was no widely recognised relationship between the availability of social housing at whatever rent level and the level of homelessness. He said that it was worth noting that rent arrears typically accounts for less than 1 in 5 cases of homelessness in East Herts. Members were advised of the more frequent reasons including the private landlord needing a property back or friends and family no longer being able to accommodate a household.

Councillor Goldspink asked how social rent could be set at 50% of local market rent if market rent did not have a bearing on social rent. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that social rents were set based on a nationally defined formulae that did not factor in market rent. The Head of Housing and Health said that there were two regimes for setting rents and he explained these regimes for Members.

Councillor Kemp asked if Members could have more background information about the 75% relets at social rent on the basis of whether people were moving house and keeping social rent levels or were Housing Associations voluntarily setting social rent.

Councillor Kemp asked that, in relation to the people on housing benefit, was there a way that the Council could set rents at affordable levels if the Government was covering the cost of their rent to maximise income.

Councillor Kemp asked if there were any opportunities to allow tenants who paid their rent on time and were

good tenants to be transferred from affordable rent to social rent. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that it was not possible for the Council to do any of those things. He explained that rent levels were attached to properties and not tenants and the tenant did not take an agreement about social rent with them wherever they go.

The Executive Member said that there were rules in place against Councils charging different rents for those on housing benefit and for those who were not. He explained why these rules were in place.

The Executive Member said that the Council could not reward tenants of good standing by transferring them to social rent from affordable rent as rents were attached to properties and not tenants and there was no mechanism for amending rents in this way.

Councillor Wilson asked if there was a calculation that could be done to see if providing rent at social level had an impact on other council services. He asked if further consideration had been given to building council houses and were there any examples of other councils who had gone from having no council houses to building their own stock.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that it would be hard to determine whether a tenant with a lower rent would choose voluntarily to prioritise expenditure on council services or other competing demands. He said that the cost benefit analysis could not be considered as robust.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods referred Members to opportunities three and eight in appendix two as this discussed selling council land for social rent and new build. He said that as the council did not have the track record, the established capability nor the finances to build, manage and maintain properties, disposing of what little land the council had to a registered provider to build social rent homes would appear a more feasible way of using the Council's assets for the purpose of developing social rent homes.

Councillor Brady asked if consideration had been given to using commercial premises and converting these into accommodation units. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the issue would be about who would convert the premises and how this would be funded. He said that if a proposal for conversion came forward from a developer or registered provider, Officers could explore opportunities one, two, five or nine with them.

Councillor Wyllie asked if it would be possible to establish a housing company to own property solely to provide social /council housing and set rent levels appropriate to local people.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that articles of the Millstream Housing Company allowed the building of affordable housing, but the company would face the same constraints as the council, namely the lack of track record or finances to build properties. He said that the Millstream business plan for 2022/23 had identified that it would not be financially viable for

the company to build for private rent, and it would therefore be even less viable to build for social rent without subsidies.

Councillor Devonshire asked how the council could influence social housing providers to provide more social housing. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that appendix two set out ten potential opportunities to enable more social rent housing, most of which relied upon supported registered providers to do this. He referred Members to ranking of opportunities within three broad headings as this would guide Officers' efforts to maximise the impact of the Council's influence.

Councillor Curtis commented on appendix two and said that options two and five should be pursued in the first instance. He asked if staircasing was an option for shared ownership properties in East Herts. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods confirmed that this was an option.

Councillor Crystall asked if the three categories were not definitive and could be revisited over time. The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the initial action plan was a live document that would be reviewed quarterly. He said that he would like to see every opportunity explored and no options were ruled out unless they were not achievable.

Councillor Curtis said that options two and five should be explored with some thought given to the prioritisation of the other options to avoid focusing on too many options and achieving none of them.

Councillor Kemp proposed and Councillor Rutland-Barsby seconded, a motion that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods to take into account when finalising the documents prior to final approval.

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

RESOLVED – that the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be passed to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods to take into account when finalising the documents prior to final approval.

144 FIRST HOMES TECHNICAL ADVICE NOTE

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods submitted a report inviting the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposed first homes technical advice note on the basis that this would form the basis of the council's guidance to developers.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that first homes were a new form of low-cost home ownership which would see a developer provide a number of homes to buy at a discount of between 30 to 50% of market price. He said that each local authority would determine the size of the discount to be applied in their area.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that

Officers had conducted analyses that had indicated that the first homes product was not well suited to the East Herts housing market and section three of the report explained this in more detail. He stated that the table at paragraph 3.4 highlighted that the shared ownership home would be affordable for more working households in the District than a first home.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods explained that it was anticipated that the subsidy required by a developer to devote to providing first homes would reduce their ability to provide many or possibly any other affordable housing and would make the inclusion of social rent homes all but impossible.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the Council could not prohibit a developer from providing first homes as this was a nationally recognised affordable tenure. He directed Members to paragraph 2.5 for the proposed criteria for first homes and he invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and endorse the proposed first homes technical advice note for presentation to the Executive.

Councillor Goldspink stated that, in relation to the new homes and providing housing for sale at a reduced cost, the report says that Officers do not recommend this option but that developers can provide them if they want to. She asked how developers could make decisions about social housing and where they were built.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the majority of new affordable housing in East Herts

was provided on private developer sites and in these instances the developer proposed what affordable homes were provided and where they should be in a development. Officers would negotiate with the developer to ensure that the proposals were compliant with the Council's District Plan, notably that 40% of the homes were affordable with 75% of these being for affordable rent and the remaining 25 % being for shared ownership.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that the proposed first homes technical advice note sought to strengthen the council's position when negotiating with developers about the inclusion of first homes. Councillor Goldspink expressed concerns about the developers making decisions about the provision of first homes. She said that the first homes policy statement was the best that could be achieved. Councillor Goldspink expressed her hope that ways could be found for the council to have more control.

Councillor Snowdon said that he was supportive of the advice note and he was also supportive of any proposal that would support home ownership. Councillor Drake asked why four-bedroom houses had not been included in the analysis and was there a reason for this?

The Head of Housing and Health said that due to the amount of subsidy going into large four-bedroom properties, they did not tend to come forward due to the drain on the subsidies available for smaller properties. He said that there was always a finite amount of money available for affordable housing on a

site that was developer lead.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhoods said that another consideration was that how many smaller properties would be lost to accommodate four-bedroom properties.

Councillor Goldspink proposed and Councillor Devonshire seconded, a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposed First Homes Technical Advice Note for presentation to the Executive.

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

RESOLVED – that Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorses the proposed First Homes Technical Advice Note for presentation to the Executive.

145 LICENSED VEHICLES EMISSIONS UPDATE

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth submitted a report detailing the work carried out in relation to the emissions created by licensed vehicles, both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, in pursuit of the Corporate Plan action for 2022/23 to implement stricter taxi emission requirements for all new vehicle applications and renewals.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that since the 1 April 2020, all taxis licensed for the first time must meet or exceed the Euro 6

emissions standards and Officers had informed the taxi trade from 1 April 2023, the same standard would be applied to all taxis including when existing vehicles licences were renewed.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth referred to section three of the report and the 79 vehicles that were licensed and were not Euro 6 compliant that would need to be retrofitted or replaced by 1 April 2023. She said that due to the high annual mileages of 20,000 to 30,000 miles of taxis, reducing their emissions would have a significant beneficial impact on the environment.

Councillor Wilson asked if any studies had been carried to ascertain availability of taxis as mandating Euro 6 would lead to some vehicles being lost. He asked if there would be any exceptions to the policy and referred to the importance of specialised wheelchair assessable vehicles. He said that it was often difficult for the licensed trade to procure Euro 6 electric/hybrid wheelchair accessible vehicles to cater for vulnerable passengers.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said a dialogue had been ongoing with the taxi trade for a considerable period so this would not come as a surprise. She said that she would expect that allowances would be made if necessary and taxis might be licensed elsewhere if a dialogue did not take place.

The Head of Housing and Health confirmed that exemptions would be in place for types of taxi vehicle

where there was a desperate need. He confirmed that there were not many such vehicles in East Herts and Officers were aware of pressures on the taxi trade.

Councillor Crystall asked for some clarification in terms of incentive schemes that were in place to encourage the use of electric vehicles as taxis in the District. The Head of Housing and Health summarised the incentive schemes that were in place including the installation and provision of rapid chargers.

Councillor Curtis expressed a concern that creating additional barriers would exacerbate the existing problem of supply of taxis. He said that he was very supportive of cutting emissions.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership was looking at rolling out a policy in Hertfordshire in respect of low emissions. He said that a county wide charging network was being looked at for taxi drivers and the Service Manager (Licensing and Enforcement) was leading on this area of work.

Councillor Symonds proposed and Councillor Drake seconded, a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the approach being taken to limit the emissions from licensed vehicles. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the approach being taken

to limit the emissions from licensed vehicles.

146 PLANNING ENFORCEMENT 2022

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth submitted a report that set out the Council's approach to Planning Enforcement following adoption and implementation of a new Planning Enforcement Plan in March 2021. She said that concern had been expressed about the lack of planning enforcement action being taken by the council.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that this report outlined the council's current approach to planning enforcement following the adoption of the planning enforcement plan in March 2021 and provided a review of the effectiveness of the measures detailed in the plan.

Members were advised that the level of enforcement complaints remained high. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that the triage system was working effectively and had enabled Officer time to be directed based on the reports that warranted investigation. She said that a majority of enforcement investigations did not result in any further action being taken by the council as there had been no breach of planning control found or planning permission would have been granted if an application had been made or the breach was not sufficiently harmful to justify enforcement action.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that it was considered that the council's current

approach to planning enforcement was in line with central government guidance. She said that it was not appropriate to establish enforcement targets based on the completion of investigations.

Councillor Rutland-Barsby asked if anonymous reporting could be investigated or re-introduced as it was important that Members should be able to report enforcement action if any residents felt intimidated.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that section four of the planning enforcement plan sets out the specific information that was required for the planning enforcement triage process. She said that the name, address and contact number were required and were treated in the strictest confidence and were not made known to any other party.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that Officers might need to visit a property to understand the extent of any harm arising. The Council might need the reporting party to provide a statement or appear in court. If a reporting party was particularly concerned, then reports could be made via their ward or town/parish councillor.

Councillor Kemp asked about the process for informing reporting parties on the progress of the case. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that paragraph 10.4 of the enforcement plan sets out what the reporting parties can expect following reporting an alleged planning breach. She said that the reporting party would be kept informed of any

significant occurrence and reporting parties were advised that they can contact the case officer at any time.

Councillor Goldspink asked how the two types of enforcement process were categorised. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that both types of breach were reported and triaged as set out in the planning enforcement plan. She said that all reports were dealt with on a case-by-case basis and in many cases breaches in planning control were resolved without the need to issue a formal notice.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that if formal action was warranted an enforcement notice would be served on a building without planning permission and a breach of condition would be used to address a breach of a condition on a planning condition. She said that section seven of the enforcement plan provided more detail on the different types of enforcement action.

Councillor Devonshire asked that if enforcement levels continued to increase, what was being done to ensure that the proper resources were in place to address this. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that his matter would need to be raised and discussed corporately as part of the council's corporate plan. She said that there was a public enforcement register that recorded all the enforcement notices that had been served.

Councillor Ward-Booth asked the Executive Member for Planning and Growth to comment on whether she

was satisfied that the enforcement team had the resources they needed to follow up what could be significant breaches of planning conditions and planning permissions. He asked for some clarity as to when an enforcement notice was appropriate and was there a time limit as residents were concerned about a perceived lack of action.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that she was aware that were complex issues that took a long time to resolve and an enforcement notice did not necessarily provide an automatic resolution to a problem and the best way forward initially was a collaborative approach. She explained that it was for Members to decide if they felt that enforcement was an area of priority spend.

The Head of Planning and Building Control said that Officers followed government guidance to resolve matters informally and this did not mean that enforcement action was not taking place. She said that all reports were dealt with on a case-by-case basis and Officers followed every avenue open to them before taking formal action and external legal advice was often sought.

Councillor Ward-Booth said that he was aware of concerns from residents in respect of the need for a greater focus on robust action in respect of major projects in the district. The Service Manager (Development Management and Enforcement) said that the council had recently employed a Compliance Officer to deal with issues of non-compliance and he would be routinely visiting large development sites.

Councillor Snowdon said that the council was not routinely communicating with residents. He asked that the Executive Member for Planning and Growth to liaise with Officers in respect of how communication with residents and Members could be improved.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth acknowledged that communication could be improved. Councillor Snowdon sought and was given clarification as to the level of scrutiny undertaken in terms of when a decision was taken to negotiate or take formal action.

Councillor Curtis said that due to the significant number of enforcement cases the matter of boosting capacity was something that should be a made a top priority.

Councillor Page asked when and how the enforcement strategy would be reviewed and by whom. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that this was being reviewed by the Committee this evening.

The Head of Planning and Building Control said that Members were focussing on the Enforcement Plan that had been agreed in March 2021 after being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive. She said that if there were concerns this evening it was for Members to provide any observations to the Executive Member and it was for Members to consider when the next review should take place. Members were advised that there would be

a council review of enforcement policy coming up.

Councillor Devonshire said that there were concerns and he suggested that more resources be allocated to planning enforcement. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that she would have to discuss this matter with the Head of Planning and Building Control.

Councillor Snowdon asked that it was explicitly reported back that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was concerned over communications with residents about enforcement actions and also the point that had been raised in terms of whether more could be done with more resources.

Councillor Snowdon proposed and Councillor Rutland-Barsby seconded, a motion that the comments and feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the council's approach to planning enforcement be passed onto the Executive.

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

RESOLVED – that the comments and feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the council's approach to planning enforcement be passed onto the Executive.

147 FUTURE SERVICE DESIGN OF WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING SERVICES

The Executive Member for Environmental

Sustainability submitted a report seeking the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposals due to be referred to the Executive in respect of the competitive dialogue procurement for the waste and recycling collection and street cleansing contract due to expire in May 2025. The report was based on outcomes from the Member lead joint working group between East Herts Council (EHC) and North Herts Council (NHC) and identified key service changes affecting the contract specification drafting.

Members were advised that the report covered details of both East Herts Council and North Herts Council changes so that the impacts across the shared service could be fully identified. The key drivers for the services changes were set in the context of the pending national Resources and Waste Strategy and the financial challenges authorities were facing which is exacerbated by inflationary pressures.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that it was anticipated that the proposed changes will secure a more financially and environmentally sustainable service as well as making the joint contract attractive to the market. Members were being asked to consider extended frequency residual waste collections, a transition to smaller 180 litre residual waste bins, weekly separate food waste collections for houses and flats and a cessation of bring site recycling services.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the service proposals would be supported by a major communications plan and

additional staff resources to ensure a smooth transition to the new services.

Councillor Rutland-Barsby asked what steps were being taken to ensure that all refuse trucks were sustainable to reduce their carbon footprint. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that in addition to exploring a more sustainable fleet as part of the procurement process, the Council had also commissioned a report looking at the future fleet requirement for the service in terms of the viability of alternative technologies.

Councillor Devonshire asked if Officers had investigated what electronic refuse trucks were available and could be suitable for the Council. The Executive Member for Sustainability said that he was pleased to say that the council had an electric vehicle demonstration was attended in October 2021 and the East Herts Climate Change Strategy approved by Full Council on 27 July 2022 recognised the need to reduce the reliance on diesel powered refuse vehicles.

Members were advised that although the use of electric refuse vehicles was increasing it was not yet a viable solution for the council's refuse and recycling fleet. The pre-engagement work would include discussions in terms of what suitable options the council might be able to consider.

Councillor Goldspink said that, in terms of the new contract, eight years appeared to be a long time and the original contract was for seven years. She asked what had prompted the decision to change the length

of the contract and what were the advantages and disadvantages of an eight-year contract.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that a seven-year contract length was historically based on the average life of vehicles. He said that it was now increasingly common for vehicles to have a longer life and electric vehicles lasted longer with fewer moving parts. An additional contract cost saving would be made with vehicles depreciating over a longer period and less frequent contract procurement was better value for money as contract procurement exercises were resource intensive.

Councillor Goldspink asked what would happen if circumstances changed and the council wanted to make changes to the contract. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that manufacturers were flexible and there was the option to include sub clauses in the contract to ensure some flexibility in terms of frequency of collections.

Councillor Devonshire said that some residents would find three weekly collections to be extremely problematic and he asked how these residents would be helped. He said that it made sense to introduce electrically powered refuse trucks as these could be charged overnight at the depot.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the contract operated at unit rates and a price was paid per collection per bin. He said that the core service was proposed to be three

weekly collections except for some residents who received a different service. The council would be reviewing all the policies and residents who had exceptional circumstances would be considered favourably.

Councillor Kemp said that some residents would have three weekly residual collections, and some would have two weekly collections. He asked how this would work and what would be the cost implications.

Councillor Kemp asked for an update in relation to using recycling bins for flats with smaller openings to prevent contamination. He asked if 5 litre food waste collection caddies could be introduced again for residents.

Councillor Kemp asked how food waste collection would be managed in flats and how could recycling be enhanced in flats. He commented on what could be done to avoid bins being filled with compacted decomposing food waste which would be difficult to empty and clean. He asked about the cost implications of introducing separate food waste collections earlier than 2025, either voluntarily or if required to do so by legislation.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that supply of different aperture bins had been difficult with long lead times. He said that the council always tried to inform residents in flats before changing bin provision and any changes on site had to be agreed by any managing agent.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that food waste would be managed in smaller wheeled bins for flats which would be collected weekly. A food waste collection service had been operated by North Herts Council at flats since 2013. The Council would be working managing agents to ensure all flats had sufficient access to recycling.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that there was no proposal to deliver separate food waste collection caddies and some residents would still have caddies from 10 years ago. He confirmed that residents could request a food caddy if required.

The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that all residents would have their own preferences for disposing of food waste and a lot of residents disposed of this almost immediately into a 23-litre caddy kept outside. She said that the wholesale delivery cost would be prohibitive.

Councillor Rutland-Barsby asked if the council would still support volunteer litter picks. She commented on whether the council would not now have to advertise the contract across the EU following Brexit. The Executive Member for Environment Sustainability said that the only change to the public contract regulations 2015 brought in by Brexit removed all references to the EU. The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that the procurement set up was broadly very similar to before and the process would attract the companies that were interested.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the council would still be supporting organised litter picking by community groups and would be contributing with the adopt an area scheme for individuals who wished to litter pick in the district.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that introducing additional services mid contract would be expensive and it was already expected that the provision within the medium-term financial plan (MTFP) for 2025 would not be sufficient given the increases being seen in inflammatory costs.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that it was advantageous to introduce a food waste collection service alongside the extended frequency residual waste changes as this would ensure a higher resident participation in food waste collections in favour of using the residual waste bin.

The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that it would be appropriate to provide fortnightly bespoke services for some residents. Councillor Ward-Booth asked how confident the council was that reducing the size of bins would not reduce the levels of recycling. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the reduction in size of the residual waste bin to 180 litres from 240 litres would encourage residents to recycle more.

Councillor Curtis said that he had a few concerns in respect of shifting to three weekly collections for

residual waste collections and the system to be used to determine who would still need a two-weekly collection.

Councillor Symonds asked about the clearance of weeds from pavements and from outside shops. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the street cleansing would be included in the new contract and would be monitored on a weekly basis. The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that weed spraying was currently carried out under the terms of the grounds maintenance contract.

Councillor Curtis proposed and Councillor Devonshire seconded, a motion that the comments and feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the future service design of the waste, recycling and street cleansing contract be passed onto the Executive.

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

RESOLVED – that the comments and feedback of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in respect of the future service design of the waste, recycling and street cleansing contract be passed onto the Executive.

148 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME 2022/23

The Scrutiny Officer presented the draft work programme which was attached to the report as an appendix.

Councillor Rutland-Barsby commented on various concerns from some Members in respect of whether Officers could investigate ways for there to be more direct contact with the council beyond the current digital arrangements, given that the council closes its doors several days a week. She referred to this being added to the Agenda for the November meeting.

Councillor Wyllie said that the Scrutiny Officer would forward the response from the Executive Member for Corporate Services to all Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Scrutiny Officer said that Members were encouraged to look at the draft work programme with a view completing this for the civic year. She said that Members had suggested an item be added for the next meeting in terms of what work could be done in rural areas that did not immediately fall within the scope for project and also an item relation to what could be done to facilitate better linkages between towns.

The Scrutiny Officer said that Leadership Team had put a couple of items on the forward plan which would need some consideration in relation to the Surveillance Technologies Policy and Data Protection Policy, which would come before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November.

It was proposed by Councillor Curtis and seconded by Councillor Rutland-Barsby, that the Committee Work Programme, as amended, 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 proposed Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, as amended, be approved.

149 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.23 pm

Chairman
Date