

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 20
JUNE 2023, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Andrews (Chairman)
Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster, V Burt,
R Carter, N Clements, A Holt, S Marlow,
S Nicholls, C Redfern, M Swainston,
J Thomas and S Watson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors C Brittain, A Daar, B Deering,
V Glover-Ward and T Hoskin

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Lorraine Blackburn	- Scrutiny Officer
Carol Bulloch	- Systems and Support Manager
James Ellis	- Head of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer
Chloe Hipwood	- Service Manager - Waste, Recycling and Street Cleaning
Steven King	- Finance Management Trainee
Peter Mannings	- Democratic

Katie Mogan	Services Officer - Democratic Services Manager
Su Tarran	- Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service

49 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed by Councillor E Buckmaster and seconded by Councillor Andrews that Councillor Boylan be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 civic year.

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

It was proposed by Councillor Swainston and seconded by Councillor Nicholls, that Councillor Horner be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 civic year.

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

RESOLVED – that Councillor Horner be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2023/24 civic year.

50 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cox, Horner, McAndrew, Williams and Woollcombe. It was noted that Councillors Burt, Holt,

Marlow and Watson were substituting for Councillors Cox, McAndrew, Horner and Williams respectively.

51 MINUTES - 21 MARCH 2023

The Chairman said that the formal signing of the minutes presented a challenge in that to the best of his knowledge, apart from some Officers, none of the new Committee Members following the District Elections were there. He suggested that the minutes of the 21 March 2023 meeting be agreed at the next meeting in September once he and other Members had watched the meeting to establish their accuracy.

He said that he had always found minutes to have been accurate and this was not a reflection on Officers.

52 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made some introductory comments in respect of the role of Overview and Scrutiny and said that the Members of Overview and Scrutiny would set the Committee work programme and go where the evidence took them.

The Chairman talked about the independence of the Scrutiny function and said that the process only worked effectively if Members from all parties had an equal voice. He said that he would be working with Officers to set up a workshop to consider the work programme and to identify training offers. Members noted that this would take place on 27 July 2023.

53 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

54 WASTE SHARED SERVICE: CLIENT TEAM AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICE ARRANGEMENTS

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability submitted a report in respect of the outcomes of the Member lead working group between East Herts Council (EHC) and North Herts Council (NHDC) and workshops held for senior managers.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability referred to an undertaking by the Executive in 2022 to outline the governance and corporate support arrangements which would be put in place to support the new waste, recycling and street cleansing contract which would come into force in 2025.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the proposals supported the Council's goals around digital transformation and ensured that residents received a consistent service across East and North Hertfordshire.

Members were advised that the report was not seeking to make major changes from the existing arrangements and it was proposed that each council would lead on their own customer service provision with minor changes to governance and financial management arrangements.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that each council would remain responsible for its own income management and this would be facilitated by the shared client team function. He said that processes and policies will be aligned to support the new contract and minor updates have been made to service policies which would come into force in 2025.

Members were referred to a typographical error in paragraph 3.12 of the report, which should have read 2024 not 2025. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability asked that Members receive the report and provide feedback on the proposals identified in section 1 for consideration by the Executive.

Councillor E Buckmaster asked for some clarity around the customer service functions in terms of the preferred approach that had been considered by the working group. He said that he understood the benefits of the preferred approach in terms of management alignment but that each council would function separately in some areas.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that economy of scales had been identified in pursuing a joint customer service and there were also disadvantages and these had been detailed in the report.

In response to a comment from the Chairman, Councillor Andrews, the Shared Waste Services Manager detailed the role and set up of the client

services team. She talked about the existing service differences and the difficulties this posed in terms of procuring bins and catering for residents who had additional needs. Members were advised of the minor differences in respect of how the customer service teams processed assisted collections.

Councillor Watson asked about software integration and the digital service. He asked how efficiencies could be found and asked about the level of separation that would be required for the two services.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that it was his understanding that the two councils would be pursuing independent transformation to accommodate the new contract and would be operating separately.

Councillor Holt referred to a reference in the report to a level of communication between both teams to overcome any challenges of developing an online service. He asked for some clarity, at a later date, in terms of what that level of communication might look like going forward.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability explained that he and Officers would undertake to report back to Members in more detail. The Shared Waste Services Manager said that it was vital that the customer services function supported the waste service as one of the highest contact generating services. She said that Officers in the customer services teams were having regular meetings to look at these processes behind the scenes.

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services said that, in terms of the interworking between the two authorities, these details did not need to be reported to Members and these matters were covered by the two legal departments in terms of the understanding in place between North Herts and East Herts.

Councillor Clements asked about what mechanisms were in place to review the updated waste service policy statements once they had come into force. Councillor Andrews said that the overview function of the committee meant that Members would scrutinise this matter going forward due to the ongoing weekly impact on residents and due to the financial implications.

Councillor E Buckmaster asked if the inter authority agreement was flexible enough to handle the policy assumptions and there were also a lot of unknowns around resource and government waste strategy. He commented on both councils entering the procurement phase in this process.

The Shared Waste Services Manager said that the contract included various provisions that had been built into the procurement exercise to manage any potential changes that might develop as a consequence of the resources and waste strategy. She said that any fundamental changes would have to be reported back to the Executive.

The Chairman explained to Members that this report was fundamentally an overview of performance. He

said that in 18 months Members might wish to scrutinise whether the policy was being delivered and whether officers had interpreted Members' wishes.

Councillor Andrews asked about the staffing levels and referred to the shortage of HGV drivers. The Shared Waste Service Manager said that there were ongoing issues in terms of recruitment and retention across the board and there was a continuous recruitment drive. She said that Officers were engaging with bidders to improve recruitment and retention.

Councillor Buckmaster proposed and Councillor Redfern seconded, a motion that the report be received and feedback be provided to the Executive on the proposals detailed in Section 1 of the report.

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

Councillor Buckmaster proposed and Councillor Nicholls seconded, a motion that the following be recommended to the Executive:

- That the Executive support the recommendation to approve the updated waste service policy statements from May 2025.
- That the Executive support the recommendation that each council lead on their own customer service provision with one set of processes for customer interactions being developed and with a focus on resolution at the first point of contact.

- That the Executive support the recommendation to identify resources and costs to integrate the customer relationship management system with the waste management IT system.
- That the Executive support the recommendation to approve the proposed updates and changes to financial management and governance arrangements and subsequent necessary changes to the Inter Authority Agreement outlined in Section 3.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the report be received and feedback be provided to the Executive on the proposals detailed in Section 1 of the report;

(B) the following be recommended to the Executive:

- That the Executive support the recommendation that the updated waste service policy statements from May 2025.
- That the Executive support the recommendation that each council lead on their own customer service provision with one set of processes for customer interactions being developed and with a focus on resolution at the first point of contact.
- That the Executive support the

recommendation to identify resources and costs to integrate the customer relationship management system with the waste management IT system.

- That the Executive support the recommendation to approve the proposed updates and changes to financial management and governance arrangements and subsequent necessary changes to the Inter Authority Agreement outlined in Section 3.

55 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT 2024/25

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability submitted a report inviting Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the latest information around the current Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme at East Herts and whether any changes to the scheme should be considered for 2024/25.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that it was a government requirement that this matter was given annual approval. He said that the recommendation was that the scheme remained unchanged for 2024/25. The scheme was monitored in relation to caseload numbers, changes to universal credit as well as opportunities to maximise automation and efficiencies.

The Executive Member for Financial Sustainability said that a further report would be submitted to Members early in the new fiscal year for the following years' scheme to take account of changes and bring forward

recommendations for change at that time.

Members were advised that the scheme had been the same since 2013 and there were no persuasive arguments to change the Council Tax support scheme for 2024/25 and this had the advantage of ensuring a degree of certainty for residents during a difficult financial period.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service confirmed to Councillor Andrews that this report had traditionally come before Overview and Scrutiny for Members' views before being submitted to the Executive, and the Executive were due to meet on 11 July 2023. The government requirement was that this matter was then determined by Council each year.

Councillor Watson asked for some clarification regarding bad debts. He referred to the tax burden on the poorest residents. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said that the way the tax base was calculated in terms of where the cost of this benefit sits, was made up of many factors including the overall council tax and the various reliefs that were granted by the council.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said that the Council Tax support cost the council £6.6m as a part of the overall tax base of £135m. She said that Officers looked at the collectability of the debt for those people on council tax support, which equated to just over 5,000 households. She said that Officers worked with people to relieve themselves of debt and Officers also looked at the collectability of all debt.

Councillor Buckmaster said that he referred to a reference in the report that those on universal credit assumed their council tax was included and their debt was building up over time. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service set out the ways Officers engaged with residents as early as possible. She said that a small amount of money was available for hardship relief to mitigate periods of arrears for those most in need of help.

The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service replied to a query from Councillor Clements regarding the factors that were considered when changes were recommended to the scheme for council tax support.

Councillor Nicholls asked about rising interest rates and whether there were economically inactive residents who might struggle to pay council tax and had not been identified by Officers. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service said that the council tax recovery team were very conscious of any engagement they had with customers who were struggling to pay council tax.

Members were advised that residents were signposted to agencies who could assist those that were struggling. The Head of the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service set out the signposting options and the holistic advice that was on offer.

Councillor Boylan proposed and Councillor Carter seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider

that there should be no change to the East Herts local Council Tax Support scheme for 2024/25.

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

RESOLVED – that Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider that there should be no change to the East Herts local Council Tax Support scheme for 2024/25.

56 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Scrutiny Officer said that this report was the usual draft work programme and reiterated that the function of Overview and Scrutiny Committee was to be a critical friend and to hold the Executive to account for its decisions and to review existing and new policies

The Scrutiny Officer said that in considering items for scrutiny, Members should have regard to the Executive's forward plan and Overview and Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference when setting its own work programme.

Members were advised that a workshop had been arranged for 27 July 2023 with the consent of the Chairman to consider possible items for inclusion in the work programme.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the Waste Services Policy Statement discussed earlier at the meeting that Members might wish to include in their work

programme. She said that it was hoped that by holding a workshop to develop items for scrutiny, Members would be better informed to plan their work taking a longer-term strategic view of the issues facing the council.

The Scrutiny Officer referred to the scrutiny proposal form included in the Agenda which was also available via MicrosoftTEAMS Channel. She referred to the flow chart which showed the initial scoping processes for considering items for scrutiny.

It was proposed by Councillor Redfern and seconded by Councillor Watson, 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 be approved.

57 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.55 pm

Chairman
Date