

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 4
MARCH 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)
Councillors E Buckmaster, V Burt,
N Clements, N Cox, A Holt, C Horner,
G McAndrew, S Nicholls, M Swainston,
G Williams and D Woollcombe

ALSO PRESENT:

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

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Committee Support Officer
Andrew Figgis	- Economic Development Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Hilary Marsh	- Programme Manager
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

367 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Boylan, Carter and Thomas. It was noted that Councillor Burt was substituting for Councillor Carter and Councillor

Holt was substituting for Councillor Boylan.

368 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2025

Councillor Buckmaster proposed, and Councillor Clements seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2025, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

369 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The chair mentioned that he had asked a question at full council regarding taking meetings of the council on the road to towns and villages in the community. He asked if there was any appetite for Overview and Scrutiny to perhaps be a trailblazer in meeting outside of Wallfields.

Councillor McAndrew said that this was a really good idea, and asked how this would work in terms of webcasting the meetings off site. Councillor Buckmaster commented on the challenge of finding appropriate facilities.

Councillor McAndrew said that going offsite to an area where the agenda topics were not relevant to that area would not be a useful exercise.

Councillor Swainston commented on whether the new Bishop's Stortford High School had appropriate facilities in their new auditorium. Councillor McAndrew said that some parish councils had facilities for meetings to be webcasted.

370 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) report on the basis that she took part in the arts in East Herts event as a participating artist and East Herts resident, and applied for and received a grant towards this activity.

Councillors Horner, Jacobs and Swainston declared interests as Members of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF. Councillor E Buckmaster declared an interest as a Member of Sawbridgeworth Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF.

Councillor Williams declared an interest as a Member of Ware Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF.

371 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth, the Executive Member for Communities and the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability jointly submitted a report updating Members on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which officially started on 1 April 2022 and was due to cease on 31 March 2025.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth thanked Officers and the Town and Parish Clerks for their efforts in respect of projects and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). She spoke about the £3,000 new premises grants and the business strand of UKSPF funding. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth spoke about the significant work that had been undertaken towards securing grants for a lot of villages and the smaller towns. She referred in particular to the work undertaken in collaboration with Buntingford Town Council,

Sawbridgeworth Town Council and Ware Town Council.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the recommendations, which included an invitation for Members to consider priorities for the coming financial year (2025/26), and to make any recommendations to the Executive in that regard.

Councillor McAndrew said that the outcomes were all very positive so far. He referred to the table regarding funding in terms of where this had been received and what type of funding had been received.

Councillor McAndrew said that he was fully aware that some towns and parishes were more proactive than others, and he asked how the council was reaching out to those that needed help when considering applying for resources from the UKSPF.

Councillor Buckmaster referred to discussions at an environmental forum he had attended, and the links to the general environment agenda. He referred to small plots of land, town and parish councils and other clubs and associations, including allotment holders benefiting from small pots of money such as UKSPF grants.

Councillor Nicholls said that various different grants had made a massive difference to businesses, individuals, and the wider communities in so many places across the district. She was really pleased that there had been a decision to share the money, particularly in smaller communities where local parish councils had very low reserves and were trying to maintain buildings and put on events with very little budget.

Councillor Nicholls said that in Buntingford and Cottered, community spaces benefited from grant money to make them more accessible for local groups and events, and this meant that these spaces were available throughout

the year as there was often a problem in the winter when communities were not accessible as it was too expensive or too cold to put on events. She said that it was great that funds had been put into refurbishing the toilets in Buntingford.

Councillor Nichols said that going forward, funding for climate change and funds available to improve town and village centres had a lot of overlap. She said that she would like to see this continue as a funding area in the next round of UKSPF allocations in the 2025/26 financial year. She referend in particular to Aspenden Parish Council and efforts to rectify drainage issues on the village green.

Councillor Hoskin said that it was incumbent on East Herts Councillors to carry the message out to parish councils in respect of accessing UKSPF funding support. Councillor Daar said that it was easier for her to communicate with the town council as she was a double hat councillor, on both the District and the Town Council. She felt that if more District Councillors visited town and parish meetings in a consistent way, this would help with getting the messages out in respect of the grants that were available.

Councillor Horner said that he was really pleased to see the benefits of the work that had been done in respect of the UKSPF. He said that the table seemed to cover about 70% of the actual allocation, and he said that he presumed that there was still 30% going through at the moment.

Councillor Horner said that he was aware of projects in Bishop's Stortford that had not been fulfilled as they would not have been completed by the end of the 2024/25 year. He asked for a flavour of what was still outstanding and suggested that sustainability hubs could be considered for future UKSPF funding. He also

suggested using current UKSPF funding for building community capacity around environmental initiatives would mean that the fund had legacy going into the future.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that the remaining 30% of the funding was for district wide initiatives such as the energy hubs and contributions towards Hertfordshire Futures, for the film office and various other initiatives. She reiterated that district councillor involvement to assist parish councils with getting projects moved forward was definitely what was needed.

Councillor McAndrew sympathised with the officers in the timescales that had to work in when dealing with 50 plus parish councils. He praised the officers for their work.

Councillor Nicholls spoke about the setting up of an energy hub in Buntingford and also commented on Arts in East Herts as an excellent initiative. She highlighted an ongoing issue of finding suitable venues for activities across the district. She praised the proposal of setting up a steering group for a future Art in East Herts event next year perhaps.

Councillor Nicholls said that smaller groups and individual artists faced real challenges when promoting their activities and get noticed in their local communities and beyond. She said that larger umbrella events needed to be more inclusive in that respect.

Councillor Clements thanked Officers for their work. He made the point that there was a lot of good work taking place in the community that Officers were not aware of. He commented on whether future allocations could be more heavily weighted towards the villages and smaller localities.

The Executive Member for Communities said that there should be a delicate balance between grant funding for running free events and funding for marketing. Councillor Jacobs said that he had been encouraged by an observation that Bishop's Stortford had benefited from 41.6% of the total spend to the towns.

Councillor Jacobs said that next year 2025/26 funding was predominantly revenue (£473,000) and £107,000 capital. He asked if this breakdown would cause any issues as most of the spend appeared to be capital spend. He asked about the practicalities of hitting the ground running as per the advice.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said there were a number of projects where funding had been withdrawn as they could not be completed. She said that there were back up emergency projects where funding could be diverted to ensure that the funding was spent. She said that the town and village centre projects could be moved forward relatively quickly.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability mentioned carbon reductions and a focus on biodiversity. He also commented on the local nature recovery strategy and initiatives such as active travel.

Councillor McAndrew asked if any of the projects that had not been processed in the year 2024/25 would be suitable for moving in 2025/26. He referred in particular to active travel.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that there were a number of projects that would not get finished within the timeframe. She said that Officers had been creative in finding solutions for some of the projects, and there were other projects that were on the backburner and were still ready to be funded. She said that there were a number of villages that did not get

funded from the village centres fund, and applications would be very quick for any villages that had not had funding already.

Councillor Nicholls proposed and Councillor Williams seconded, a motion that the progress to date be reviewed, and the priorities for the 2025/26 civic year be considered with the following being recommended for UKSPF funding in 2025/26:

- active travel
- climate change
- town and village centres
- empowering the voluntary community

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress to date be reviewed; and

(B) the priorities for the 2025/26 civic year be considered and the following be recommended for UKSPF money in 2025/26:

- active travel
- climate change
- town and village centres
- empowering the voluntary community

372 EAST HERTS EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

The Committee Support Officer presented a report in respect of the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol to take effect from 18 March 2025, with a review due to take place in June 2027 following the district council elections.

The Committee Support Officer referred to government guidance issued in April 2024 in respect of Overview and Scrutiny and how this should be conducted. The guidance was shared with the Committee and the protocol set out

the principles that should define the relationship between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee Support Officer explained that the protocol was less procedural than the constitution and was more of a set of principles to guide members of Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive. Members were invited to comment on the protocol and agree to sign up to the protocol prior to approval by the Executive.

Councillor Buckmaster commented on whether there were any differences that could be highlighted compared to what had been happening previously. The Committee Support Officer said that the protocol highlighted the opportunity for Executive Members to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Councillor McAndrew said that the protocol document had not included the words overview and scrutiny. The Committee Support Officer said that the protocol document was intended to be a guide for how the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny should ideally work.

The Chair explained that this committee could still scrutinise external activities and could accept requests for scrutiny from external organisations. He said that this was not reflected in the flow chart and asked that the word Overview be included in the document.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the links in the document and referred to narrative in terms of what Members wanted to get out of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He said that Members to date had not got together to consider topics in terms of what was to be scrutinised and what questions were going to be asked, and in particular what outcomes Members were looking for.

Councillor McAndrew commented on training for the committee and referred to a half a day session he had attended some years ago in Westminster followed by observing a Westminster overview and scrutiny meeting. He said that training on offer now was less in depth, and he wondered what training could be on offer moving forward to adopt the scrutiny protocol.

Councillor McAndrew referred to a comment from the chair earlier in the meeting about going out to parishes. He asked about the guidance that stated that a Local Authority should consider how communications officers could help scrutiny engage with the public and how wider internal expertise and local knowledge from Members and Officers might contribute to that engagement.

Members made a number of comments in respect of performance monitoring and key performance indicators (KPIs). The Chair made the point that the committee looked at the performance indicators that were relevant to the topic that Members were discussing, e.g. herbicides.

Councillor Horner said that the protocol document did indicate that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could use performance data to identify topics for scrutiny going forward.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the point in the document about how and when scrutiny could best influence policy and development. He asked how this would evolve moving forward.

The Chair said that he had invited the Executive to the forward plan workshop at the end of March. He also said that he had an open invite to the Joint Administration Steering Group where issues were identified for scrutiny by this Committee.

Councillor Woollcombe commented on benchmarking and KPIs and the need for more specifics in that regard. The Chair said that the issue was to what extent this detail needed to be highlighted in the primary document rather than as a link. He said that the Executive could be asked to consider whether they felt that was necessary.

Councillor Woollcombe proposed, and Councillor Swainston seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny have considered and commented on the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol and Overview and Scrutiny sign up to the protocol prior to approval of the protocol by the Executive.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered and commented on the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol; and

(B) Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree to sign up to the protocol prior to approval of the protocol by the Executive.

373 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Support Officer submitted the work programme report and Members were invited to consider and determine the work programme going forward.

The Chair reminded Members of the workshop due to be held in March via MS teams, to which the Executive had been invited. There were a number of comments from Members that the forward plan for the Executive needed to go further ahead.

Councillor Nicholls proposed and Councillor Clements seconded a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme be agreed. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1 be agreed.

374 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman
Date