

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,  
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY  
20 JANUARY 2026, AT 7.00 PM

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PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)  
Councillors P Boylan, E Buckmaster,  
R Carter, N Clements, N Cox, C Horner,  
S Nicholls, T Smith, M Swainston and  
J Wyllie

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors M Goldspink and S Hopewell

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Jonathan Geall	- Director for Communities
Katherine Gilcreest	- Housing Lead
Sara Saunders	- Director for Place
Stephanie Tarrant	- Assistant Director for Democracy, Elections and Information Governance

293 APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was submitted from Councillor S Marlow.

294 MINUTES - 4 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillor Horner proposed, and Councillor Nicholls seconded, a motion the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 4 November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the chair, subject to the following amendment:

Delete in minute 224 – ‘Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the matters referred to in minute 220, on the grounds that she had participated both of Development Management Forums as a local district ward councillor’.

Replace with – ‘Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the matters referred to in minute 226, on the grounds that she had participated both of Development Management Forums as a local district ward councillor.’

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

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 4 November 2025 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendment:

Delete in minute 224 – ‘Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the matters referred to in minute 220, on the grounds that she had participated both of Development Management Forums as a local district ward councillor.’

Replace with – ‘Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the matters referred to in minute 226, on the grounds that she had participated both of Development Management Forums as a local district ward councillor.’

## 295 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting. He reminded everyone present to use the microphones when speaking as the meeting was being webcasted.

## 296 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

297 EXTENSION OF THE GROUND CONTRACT AND THE USE OF GLYPHOSATE IN THE GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Executive Member for Wellbeing submitted a report in respect of the current grounds maintenance contract that was due to expire on 31 December 2027. She explained that Glendale were in year 6 of an 8-year grounds contract with the option of reprocurring or extending for a further 5 years.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing said that should the council wish to retender the contact, the process would need to begin in 2026 and would likely take approximately two years to complete. She said that there were financial implications for that option estimated at approximately £70k to cover the cost of potential external consultants and also for substantial officer time.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing set out the maintenance activities covered by the contract. She said that with local government reorganisation on the horizon, an alternative was to extend the existing contract for up to a further 5 years. Part of this extension could include potential improvements such as around the use of Glyphosate.

The Executive Member for Wellbeing welcomed suggestions around alternative options and said that she was aware that Members were keen to explore what other options maybe available. The Executive Member said that she was keen to hear Members' further thoughts on the ground's maintenance contract and the use of Glyphosate.

Members asked questions in respect of the following:

- Tendering arrangements and removing Glyphosate from the contract
- Outcomes of research into alternatives to Glyphosate

- as the only available research is out of date
- Not using Glyphosate in parks and alternatives for parks and open spaces
  - LGR review and break clauses in the grounds' maintenance contract
  - Alternatives being used by other councils e.g. Hackney (mulches and wildflower planting to encourage wildlife)
  - Residue of Glyphosate in children's playgrounds
  - Private members' bill going through parliament calling for councils to ban the use of Glyphosate in public areas.
  - Health and Safety Executive review of Glyphosate licensing and a public consultation
  - Harm of Glyphosate being used in the wrong place (chalk rivers/streams in East Herts)
  - Harm to wildlife and a collapse in biodiversity for a number of insect species populations
  - What the Council was doing to reduce and eliminate the use of Glyphosate (might have to be the odd exception - i.e. to control Japanese Knotweed)
  - If the period of contract extension could be for two years instead of up to 5 years into the new unitary authority
  - Further detail around the meeting of monthly key performance indicators (KPIs)

Members heard that there was scope when the contract was extended for Officers to have discussions with the contractor around key elements, which could include the use of Glyphosate and other areas of concern or where the council wanted to see some improvements.

The Director for Place explained that she could not comment on what was previously discussed, and Members were advised that the lead officer had not been working since September. She said that the Senior Leisure and Parks Development Officer was more well informed and could give Members more information on the day-to-day operation of the ground's maintenance

contract.

The Director for Place said that she would be looking for the team to take this matter further and, in more detail, as Officers looked to explore the contract. She said that she would come back to Members to explain what Officers had been looking at already and how they would take this matter forward. Members were also advised that there would be a break clause in the contract to allow for what may happen in terms of local government reorganisation.

Councillor Cox proposed, and Councillor Nicholls seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered the proposals to extend the current grounds maintenance contract with Glendale for a further five years and had provided comments to the Executive Member for Wellbeing regarding an alternative use of the herbicide glyphosate and investigations regarding different methods of weed control for East Herts Council's parks and open spaces.

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

**RESOLVED** – that (A) Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered the proposal to extend the current grounds maintenance contract with Glendale for a further five years.

(B) the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding an alternative use of the herbicide glyphosate and investigations regarding different methods of weed control for East Herts Council's parks and open spaces be forwarded to the Executive Member for Wellbeing.

## 298 SCRUTINY OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS' COMMUNICATIONS METHODS

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Councillor Sue Nicholls, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, submitted a report from the task and finish group

that was set up by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review communication methods used by registered providers of housing in the district.

Councillor Nicholls thanked the registered providers that had engaged in the process. She also thanked the Members of the Task and Finish Group and the East Herts officers that had supported the work of the Group. Councillor Nicholls thanked Jane Wilson from East Herts Citizens Advice and Elizabeth Lil and Jonathan Munge from SNG for attending the meeting in December.

Councillor Nicholls said that the establishment of the Task and Finish Group was intended to review the methods of communication used by registered providers to engage with their tenants, elected members and council officers.

Councillor Nicholls said that the scrutiny proposal was driven by a wish to identify actions that could result in tangible improvements not only for residents when dealing with their registered housing provider but also changes for officers - to aid communication and opportunities to develop better working practices, and for Members to enable them to advocate on behalf residents in a more effective and timely manner.

Councillor Nicholls set out when Task and Finish Group meetings were held and referred Members to the minutes from those meetings. She referred to the varied engagement from the registered providers and said that this served to highlight the difficulties with communication experienced by some residents and Members.

Councillor Nicholls said that Members of the Task and Finish Group were impressed by the information that was shared by those who did engage in the process and enabled a greater understanding and insight into the processes used by registered providers, the council and partners to provide services and support for residents.

Councillor Nicholls said that many examples of best

practice were shared, and these had been used to inform the recommendations. She summarised the suggestions for changes to working practices and arrangements to help improve communication between officers, registered providers and other stakeholders. Other issues were also identified such as scope for improvements in communication between the council and the East Herts Citizens Advice. Members were advised that this issue was being taken forward separately from the recommendations.

Councillor Nicholls said that it was worth noting that the housing ombudsman's 2023 spotlight report on attitude, respect and rights had identified that communications were a key issue in around 68% of complaints investigated by the ombudsman. Members were advised that as part of their call for evidence, 58% of respondents had a disability and 58% of those respondents said that no reasonable adjustments had been made to help them with their complaints.

Councillors Nicholls stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining good communications between residents and housing providers as well as other stakeholders. She said that it was important to consider the needs of all residents to avoid exclusion and the unnecessary escalation of issues affecting tenants. Members were advised that poor communication could exacerbate already difficult situations and lead to an erosion of trust leaving tenants feeling frustrated and isolated.

Members asked questions in respect of the Citizens Advice service, anti-social behaviour and neighbour disputes, complaints from residents, keeping track of new housing providers and any follow up work on the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.

Councillor Nicholls explained that one of the issues was that the citizens advice service did not have up to date contact details for various council departments. She said

that they had been updated with that information already and the permissions for video conference calling were being looked at. Members were advised that the availability of space within Wallfields for the Citizens Advice Service was being explored.

Councillor Nicholls explained that officers often already knew about an issue and were best placed to deal with this. She said that in most instances Members did not need to get involved and they had asked for clearer information and a list of instructions on best practice.

Councillor Nicholls said that officers had given feedback that they would like more ongoing involvement in casework meetings and stakeholder holder meetings.

Councillor Jacobs drew Members' attention to the standing item on the agenda whereby the Executive could report back to Overview and Scrutiny on things that the Executive had taken forward.

Councillor Nicholls proposed, and Councillor Swainston seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny had considered the recommendations made by the appointed Task and Finish Group at paragraph 2.1 of the report and Members agree that the recommendations, subject to any amendments, be forwarded to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for her consideration prior to onward recommendation to the Executive.

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

**RESOLVED** – that (A) Overview and Scrutiny had considered the recommendations made by the appointed Task and Finish Group at paragraph 2.1 of the report; and

B Members agreed that the recommendations, subject to any amendments, be forwarded to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for her

consideration prior to onward recommendation to the Executive.

299 FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

There were no items for Executive feedback.

300 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

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The Assistant Director for Democracy Elections and Information Governance submitted the work programme report and Members were invited to consider and determine the work programme going forward.

The Assistant Director for Democracy Elections and Information Governance set out the two matters that were coming forward for the meeting on 10 March 2026. She said that these were AI and its use by the council and the parking strategy progress report.

Members were advised that there were some additional items to be included which were the council's approach to achieving net zero carbon by 2030 and a scrutiny proposal form had been submitted by Councillor Hoskin on the 9th of January. This document had been shared with the committee and the leadership team.

The Assistant Director for Democracy Elections and Information Governance said that the sustainable transport topic was still awaiting a proposal form, and this matter would be brought before Members in June 2026.

Members were advised that a proposal form had been received from Councillor Cox which was on the back of the motion to council in October around sewage discharge into the rivers. This form had also been circulated to members and Democratic Services were now following up on this as a possible topic for June.

The Assistant Director for Democracy Elections and

Information Governance said that two proposal forms had been submitted in relation to LGR and the Chief Executive, Helen Standen, had confirmed it would be premature for Overview and Scrutiny to consider this at the at the present time. Members were advised that this matter would therefore be brought before the committee in due course.

Councillor Jacobs said that Members should consider whether a workshop should be held March, as per the approach taken for the last two years, to shape the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in more detail beyond June.

Councillor Horner proposed, and Councillor Clements seconded a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, as amended, 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, as amended, be agreed.

301 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.45 pm

Chairman .....
Date .....