



MEETING : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : TUESDAY 20 JANUARY 2026
TIME : 7.00 PM

PLEASE NOTE TIME AND VENUE

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<https://www.youtube.com/user/EastHertsDistrict>

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor David Jacobs (Chair)

Councillors D Andrews, P Boylan, E Buckmaster, R Carter, N Clements, N Cox, C Horner (Vice-Chair), S Marlow, S Nicholls, T Smith, M Swainston, G Williams and J Wyllie

Substitutes

Conservative Group: Councillors A Holt and G Williamson

Green Group: Councillors V Burt, V Smith and S Watson

Labour Group: Councillor C Redfern

Liberal Democrat Group: Councillor R Townsend

Reform: Councillor G McAndrew

(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member to Democratic Services 7 hours before the meeting, i.e. by midday on the day of the meeting)

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AGENDA

1. Apologies

To receive apologies for absence.

2. Minutes - 4 November 2025 (Pages 5 - 21)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2025.

3. Chair's Announcements

4. Declarations of Interest

To receive any Members' Declarations of Interest.

5. Extension of the Ground contract and the use of glyphosate in the grounds' maintenance contract (Pages 22 - 28)

6. Scrutiny of Registered Providers' Communications Methods (Pages 29 - 50)

This is a report from the task and finish group agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review communication methods used by Registered Providers of housing in the district. This report makes recommendations for improvements to be put to the Executive for consideration.

7. Feedback from the Executive

8. Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Draft Work Programme (Pages 51 - 55)

9. Urgent Items

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

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

PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)
Councillors E Buckmaster, R Carter,
N Clements, N Cox, C Horner, S Marlow,
S Nicholls and M Swainston

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Crystall, V Glover-Ward,
M Goldspink, T Hoskin, G McAndrew,
J Thomas and C Wilson

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

James Ellis	- Director for Legal, Policy and Governance and Monitoring Officer
Erica Gant	- Committee Support Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Director for Communities
Jeanette Lowden	- Contracts Manager
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Brian Moldon	- Director for Finance, Risk and Performance
Martin Plummer	- Service Manager (Development Management and Enforcement)
Stephanie Tarrant	- Assistant Director for Democracy, Elections and

Neil Wright

Information
Governance
- Shared Service
Manager (Benefits)

221 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Andrews, Boylan, T Smith, Williams and Wyllie.

222 MINUTES - 16 SEPTEMBER 2025

Councillor Nicholls proposed, and Councillor Swainston seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 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 16 September 2025, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

223 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The chair reminded members to use the microphones as the meeting was being webcasted.

The full webcast of the meeting can be viewed here: [Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 4 November 2025](#)

224 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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.

225 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2026/27

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) submitted a report inviting Members of Overview and Scrutiny to consider the latest available information around the current local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme at East Herts and to comment on the proposal that there be no change for 2026/27.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the department's caseload varied, and that he was pleased that it had increased this year following a take up exercise and the simplification of the application process.

Members were reminded that the county council and the police were preceptors, and they had no problem with the existing scheme being extended into 2026/27.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that this was the culmination of an extensive piece of work and officers wanted to ensure that no one lost out following changes to the scheme and also ensure that, wherever possible, the scheme was cost neutral.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that there was a lot of consultation required so that the scheme was well publicised and any issues had been discussed. He said that extensive business modelling was not sufficiently complete to introduce a scheme for 2026/27 and there had also not been time to embark on the necessary consultation.

Councillor Buckmaster said that he appreciated that attempts had been made at alternative ways of doing things, and his instinct was that it was too late for the coming financial year, and it would be safer to keep things as they were for 2026/27.

Councillor Nicholls asked if a new scheme could be trialled as a dry run or test before it was used by a local authority that took the place of the district council. The

Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the scenario of a dry run had formed part of the business modelling carried out by officers looking at the feasibility of a new scheme.

Councillor Horner expressed disappointment that the council was not yet at a point where a banded scheme could be looked at. He said that he very much took the point about the timing of this and going into Local Government Reform (LGR). He also noted that there had been some increase in the number of claimants under working age and he asked if the figures presented in the graph were year to date figures and were Officers expecting this figure to increase between now and the end of the financial year.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the figures were year to date figures, and he did expect there to be an increase in the caseload. He said that Officers had already seen the main impact of the take up work that had been undertaken and the number of new cases was starting to slow down.

Members were advised that in respect of devising a banded scheme, the network of Hertfordshire Benefit Managers had been surprised by the impact of universal credit where working age people started to receive this. Officers did not envisage the complexity of the impact of universal credit on council tax support claims.

The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that he had been in contact with his colleague at North Herts to discuss the scheme that was in operation. He said that there were always complex issues to consider in terms of benefits and council tax support.

Councillor Marlow asked if officers knew whether the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had looked at this in terms of trying to make the system easier and whether officers had approached the DWP in that regard.

The Shared Services Manager said that all local authorities liaised with the DWP and officers always tried to explain issues to the DWP and network with them. He said that the council was left to work out its own council tax support scheme within the rules around universal credit.

Councillor Swainston asked if officers could explain why the pensioner claim caseload had gone down. The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the pensioner caseload tended to be more stable. He said that the established caseload of pensioners tended to diminish due to the nature of claimants themselves.

Members were advised that Officers had noticed an increase in caseload this financial year as there had been effort to simplify the claims process. The Shared Service Manager (Benefits) said that the council did not want pensioners to struggle with completing applications. He said that officers were always looking to increase the caseload for pensioners and to make the process as easy as possible.

Councillor Nicholls proposed, and Councillor Cox seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had commented on the proposal that there be no change to the local council tax support scheme for 2026/27.

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

RESOLVED – that Overview and Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposal that there be no change to the local council tax support scheme for 2026/27.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth submitted a report that provided the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Community Forums (CFs) and the Development Management Forums (DMFs).

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that in November 2023, she had presented the idea of having a set of CFs for strategic sites post planning approval and also a DMF during the planning application process.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had resolved in November 2023 that there be an update after two years to allow for the collection of meaningful data on the impact of the forums.

Members were advised that the report summarised attendance figures, operational approaches and key observations arising from both the CFs and the DMFs.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that consideration had also been given to the resource implications of hosting these forums and suggestions for further improvements and data collection were highlighted in the report.

Members of Overview and Scrutiny were invited to review the information provided and to assess the forums contribution to community engagement and planning transparency.

Councillor Buckmaster said that the community forums were informative, and he had noticed that over time the numbers attending had decreased. He wondered whether the council could reach out to the wider community to secure their involvement.

Councillor Buckmaster suggested that the council could talk directly to the neighbourhood plan group and the

affected parishes to ascertain how the council could engage more with the community.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said there was a pre-meeting with the neighbourhood plan group and the parish councillors, and the council had asked them exactly that question. She said that part of the idea was reaching out to the members of the community who might not discuss things with the parish council or the neighbourhood planning group.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that some of the topics that the community might wish to raise were very specific. Members were advised that the council was working on better communications and officers were considering ways to encourage more people to engage in the process.

Councillor Carter asked how the council decided when to hold a forum meeting and who made the decisions as to when a meeting was arranged. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that the district council scheduled the forum meetings, and this scheduling depended on how many issues were at stake. She explained that Gilston was having a quarterly forum as this was one of the largest developments in the country.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth referred to Stortford Fields and said that the community forum had been arranged to address a number of problems that had built up over a number of years. She said that the council was working to resolve what were some quite complicated issues. Members were advised that Stortford Fields had a meeting every 6 months and Gilston every 3 months.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth referred to forthcoming meetings for both HERT3 and HERT4, and a couple of meetings would be arranged in relatively short order. She said that the pace of meetings would then slow

down as once forums were established the demand for information slowed down.

Councillor Nicholls said that the community forums worked very well in the context of the master planning process for strategic sites. She asked whether it would be a good idea for developers who submitted speculative applications to take part in the process.

Councillor Nicholls said that the forums allowed developers to see the local community they planned to build in as somewhere that contained people who might have concerns and also had really useful local knowledge. She said that a recent development management forum had secured better outcomes for the community. She emphasised that some key areas of concern had got a lot more attention than would have otherwise been the case.

Councillor Swainston summarised her positive experiences of being involved in the community forum process in respect of Stortford Fields. She referred to the positive involvement of residents and commented in particular to the involvement of district and county officers present in helping the public knowing who to contact.

Councillor Clements asked how much the success of the forums had been dependent on developers engaging with the process in good faith. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that developers were somewhat nervous of the process before attending the forum meetings, and in particular regarding attending the DMFs. She referred to messages she had received after the meetings regarding the usefulness of the opportunity.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that as regards the community forums, she felt that there was an element of developers being somewhat scared of the unknown. She said that the forums were now established, and developers were seeing the benefits in terms of

working in partnership with communities rather than getting lots of complaints.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that the initial fractious nature of some of the early forum meetings calmed down after three or four meetings. She said that developers benefited from not having a community up in arms but one that would come and talk to them to resolve problems.

Councillor Jacobs said that there had been no DMF meetings this year and he wondered if the criteria needed to be considered in terms of the thresholds for holding meetings. He commented on the levels of awareness of the forum meetings.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that there had not been that many large development applications that would have been eligible in the last year.

The Service Manager (Development Management and Enforcement) said that there had been less need for DMFs when compared to 2024, having regard to the types of applications submitted. He said that officers could look at the threshold and the awareness and knowledge levels of local ward members. He said that officers could take those issues away and consider what could be done going forward.

Councillor Buckmaster proposed, and Councillor Swainston seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the information provided in the report relating to the establishment of the Community Forum and Development Management Forum and had provided observations to the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

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

RESOLVED – that Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered the information provided in the report relating to the establishment of the Community Forum and Development Management Forum and have provided observations to the Executive Member for Planning and Growth.

227 **SCRUTINY OF REGISTERED PROVIDERS' COMMUNICATIONS METHODS**

Councillor Sue Nicholls, Chair of the Task and Finish Group, said that the first task and group was held on 29 October 2025, which was attended by all four group Members, Councillors Carter, Marlow, Nicholls and Swainston, with support from the Housing Lead Officer Katherine Gilcreest.

Councillor Nicholls explained that she had outlined the work programme that had been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She said that the Members discussed the scope of the review that was to be undertaken in the communication of housing providers with customers, elected members and council officers, as well as external partners who could provide the benefit of their experience and how this could benefit the review process.

Councillor Nicholls said that the housing lead officer had presented a report to the group that outlined the responses from the survey that had been sent to registered providers about their current communication methods.

Councillor Nicholls said that this had been a useful exercise as it had demonstrated some of the issues that residents, members and officers have in trying to contact registered providers. The Task and Finish Group reviewed the survey and had agreed slight amendments to provide clear responses to a couple of questions and an additional question about the role of elected members.

Councillor Nicholls said that it was also agreed that the survey would be recirculated to registered providers yet to respond and the local contacts which were held by officers would be used for housing providers, in order to hopefully increase the response rate. The Task and Finish Group had also requested that a map was produced that showed where registered providers were operating in the district.

Members were advised that it was also decided that three further task and finish group meetings would be held, with expert witnesses being invited to the next two meetings on 17 November and 4 December 2025, to help inform the recommendations of the group and to provide information on current processes, areas of good practice and areas for improvement.

Councillor Nicholls said that the group would invite officers from East Herts Environmental Health and Community Safety, representatives from East Herts citizens advice, the housing regulator, a large housing provider and two smaller housing providers.

Councillor Nicholls said that the final task and finish group meeting would be held on 6 January 2026 where members would draw together the information gathered from expert witnesses and put together recommendations for the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

Councillor Nicholls said that she would present the report containing the recommendations of the task and finish group to the 20 January 2026 meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Executive Member for Neighbourhood added her thanks to Councillor Nicholls for making the arrangements for the Task and Finish Group meetings. Councillor Jacobs asked if the 20 January 2026 was a realistic timetable for the final report.

The Director for Communities suggested that to keep to the pace and the timescale would be his suggestion with an option to review progress nearer to 20 January 2026. Councillor Carter said that this was going to be a really interesting piece of work, and she was glad that the citizens advice bureau would be asked for evidence as part of the scrutiny process of registered providers communication methods.

Councillor Horner proposed, and Councillor Cox seconded, a motion that the progress of the task and finish group be approved and a final report on this review with recommendations be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 20 January 2026.

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

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress of the task and finish group be approved; and

B a final report on this review with recommendations be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 20 January 2026.

228 MOBILISATION OF WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability submitted a report that provided an update regarding the mobilisation of waste, recycling and collection services from the start of the new contract in May 2025, primarily focusing on the roll out of the new waste and recycling services from August 2025.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability submitted a detailed verbal PowerPoint presentation that updated Members on the mobilisation of the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract. He said that 97% of containers were delivered as of 4 August, and

whilst this was an excellent result it had still left about 1600 households without the required containers.

Members were advised that all containers had now been delivered, with a caveat that this was as far as the council was aware.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability presented a series of slides about tonnages of collection of food waste and other types of waste. He presented details about the underlying performance of the collection crews. Members were also presented with data in respect of missed bins collections and were advised that there still improvements to make.

Councillor Buckmaster commented on whether there was a better project management template that could be used in the future for a project on this scale. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability said that the customer service element could have better managed in East Herts.

Councillor Nicholls acknowledged the achievement of this project was and she was pleased to read about the decarbonisation of the vehicle fleet. She referred to problems for customers and residents trying to use online forms to report concerns and the consequent overloading of customer services as being a big area of frustration and criticism.

Councillor Nicholls asked whether the IT system incompatibilities and other issues to do with digital transformation could have been identified earlier and did any of those problems still remain. The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that the webforms not being live did have a big impact on East Herts customer services. She said that officers were working with customer services and digital teams on that.

Members were advised that the reporting of missed bins could be done online and integrated straight into the

waste management system. The Shared Service Manager (Waste) said that the impact on customer services had reduced significantly. She said that the roll out of the bin deliveries was adversely affected by the different systems being used to co-ordinate the deliveries.

Councillor Marlow commented on whether the council had asked questions of North Hertfordshire District Council about what was involved in a roll out on this scale. He made a number of points about the questions that should have been resolved at the outset of the mobilisation of the contract.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability explained that he believed that the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract was provided by a very experienced team of officers that had jointly managed the waste collection regimes at North Herts and East Herts.

The Shared Service Manager (Waste) made a number of points in respect of the project management arrangements that were in place for the roll out of the contract. Councillor Carter said that it was very impressive that the project was moving towards achieving a huge reduction in food waste and increase in recycling.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability and the Shared Service Manager (Waste) answered a number of further questions about CRM, data corruption regarding letters, bin deliveries and the timescale of rolling out the contract during the summer. Members were advised that there was a backlog in requests for assisted or high frequency collections and officers were working through those requests.

The Shared Service Manager (Waste) responded to a question from Councillor Jacobs in respect of the residents of Folly Island in Hertford and a petition expressing concerns about the bin deliveries in that particular community. She also responded to a question

about the rationalisation of litter bins outside town and village centres.

Councillor Carter proposed, and Councillor Cox seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed and provided comments on the update on waste, recycling and street cleansing contract mobilisation.

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

RESOLVED – that that Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed and provided comments on the update on waste, recycling and street cleansing contract mobilisation.

229 FEEDBACK FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Chair said that this was the new standing item following the approval of the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol. The Leader confirmed that there were no matters on which the Executive needed to provide feedback.

230 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 Committee Support Officer set out the matters coming forward for the meetings in January and March 2026.

Councillor Cox referred to a matter in respect of sewage that he had produced a proposal form for. He asked if this could be included on the committee work programme.

Councillor Jacobs said that the committee had yet to agree when the matter of local government reform would

come before Members for a discussion. He said that a date would be put into the diary on this matter.

Councillor Buckmaster said that his original intention when proposing this topic was really around the council examining the assets that it had so that there was an understanding of the assets if these needed to be transferred to a unitary authority or disposed of.

Councillor Jacobs said that a list of assets had been produced by the Director for Communities, and he would share this with members of the committee. Councillor Buckmaster suggested that this matter should be kept on the list of topics in the work programme.

Councillor Horner said that on the forward plan there was an Executive decision around the LCWIP which would fit in nicely with the topic of sustainable transport on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme.

The Committee Support Officer explained that the Director for Place had indicated that the matter of retender of the grounds maintenance contract and glyphosate would come to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2026. Members were also advised that the officer initially leading on this topic had now handed over the work to another officer.

Councillor Carter proposed, and Councillor Cox 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 in Appendix 1, as amended, be agreed.

231 URGENT ITEMS

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chairman

Date

Agenda Item 5

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 20 January 2026

Report by: Councillor Sarah Hopewell – Executive Member for Wellbeing

Report title: Extension of the Ground contract and the use of glyphosate in the grounds' maintenance contract

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

- The current grounds maintenance contract is due to expire on 31 December 2027. In preparation, we are undertaking a review of the potential extension of the contract.
- In addition, Members have requested a review of the current grounds' maintenance contract in relation to the use of glyphosate within the district.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

- A. To consider the proposal to extend the current grounds maintenance contract with Glendale for a further five years.
- B. To provide 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.

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 Extending the current contract is considered more practical at this stage than proceeding directly to a full tender. In light of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and based on advice from the procurement team, extending the current contract is considered the most appropriate course of action at this time. This approach

offers a more cost-effective solution, mitigates transitional risk and ensures continuity of service, while deferring the need to proceed to a full tender process.

- 1.2 As part of the extension, it is proposed that the Council renegotiates and reviews key areas of the contract to identify potential improvements and alternative methods of delivery. The Procurement Team is supportive of this approach in principle, subject to operating within agreed parameters.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the use of glyphosate be eliminated from the grounds' maintenance contract across East Herts Council-owned parks and open space.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Glendale is currently in year five of an eight-year grounds maintenance contract, which includes an optional five-year extension. Glendale is meeting contractual requirements and monthly KPIs, including those relating to customer complaints and enquiries covering grass, shrubs, weeds, flowerbeds, footpaths, hedges, and dog and litter bins.
- 2.2 If the grounds maintenance contract were to be retendered, the process would need to commence in early 2026, as previous grounds maintenance tenders have taken approximately two years to complete.
- 2.3 The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2022–2027 sets out a clear vision for the protection, management and development of the district's parks and open spaces to support the health, wellbeing and quality of life of residents.
- 2.4 It recognises parks as essential community assets, providing opportunities for recreation, tranquil natural environments, biodiversity and sustainable habitats, while responding to increasing demand arising from population growth. It also commits to the delivery of major improvement projects and to ensuring that green spaces remain fit for purpose, financially sustainable where appropriate and capable of continuing to deliver social and environmental benefits. The majority of this work is delivered by Glendale through the ground's maintenance

contract.

- 2.5 The effective delivery of this strategy is heavily dependent on the ground's maintenance contract, which is a critical for the high quality, day-to-day management of parks and open spaces. Glendale plays a central role in this delivery, providing the operational capability, consistency and professional expertise required to maintain standards across the district. The contract covers routine maintenance of shrub beds, annual and perennial beds, grassed areas, hedges, football pitches, hard tennis courts, fitness tracks, shelters, and watercourses, together with associated instructed activities.
- 2.6 It includes risk-based inspections, trimming and formative pruning of shrubs and trees, weeding, fertilising, mulching, planting, and ongoing maintenance, sports pitch preparation and marking, litter and leaf collection and the emptying of waste and dog bins, sweeping of paths and car parks and the maintenance and painting of play areas, goalposts, equipment, fencing, and seating. Through the contract, Glendale is instrumental in ensuring that the Council's parks and green spaces remain safe, attractive and fit for purpose.
- 2.7 The Executive Member for Wellbeing invited the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the report dated 4 November 2024, 'The Use of Glyphosate in the Grounds Maintenance Contract'. This followed Members' interest in scrutinising the Council's use of glyphosate.
- 2.8 The Council currently undertakes weed control on pavements and gullies across the district on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council under an agency agreement. Effective weed control on highway pavements supports the street cleansing team by reducing the need for mechanical weed removal. Regular brushing prevents weeds from becoming established, helping to protect surface infrastructure and reduce trip hazards.
- 2.9 Under the agreement, Glendale applies glyphosate twice each year. Glyphosate is a non-selective herbicide, meaning it will kill most plants. It is widely used to control unwanted vegetation in parks and gardens, working by being absorbed through the leaves. Glendale also uses it to manage weeds in shrub beds and

to prevent grass and weed encroachment onto footpaths in certain open spaces.

- 2.10 In 2019, alternatives to chemical weed control were explored during the retender of the ground's maintenance contract. This was considered by a Member Task and Finish Group, who were advised by tenderers that chemical control remains the most cost-effective solution. While other methods, such as hot foam and propane flame, are available, they are relatively expensive and have not been proven to be as effective as herbicides.
- 2.11 Glendale also employs hand weeding and hoeing in certain ornamental areas, including herbaceous beds and annual bedding, where it is the most effective method for maintaining high standards. However, hand weeding across the entire district is not economically viable. Herbicide is used only in areas of parks designated for conservation or habitat improvement, and only where absolutely necessary, for example, to control invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

3.0 Reason(s)

- 3.1 The grounds maintenance contract provides a vital, customer facing service, and it is essential that high standards are maintained. Glendale is meeting contractual requirements and delivering a cost-effective service. Extending the contract by five years would ensure continuity across the district's parks and open spaces.
- 3.2 The use of glyphosate has been debated for many years. With the potential extension of the grounds maintenance contract, the opportunity to review and negotiate the use of herbicides should be considered as part of the contract discussions.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 A full re-procurement is not considered appropriate at this time, as it would introduce additional cost, risk and uncertainty at a point when the Council requires some flexibility. Re-procurement also carries a material risk of service disruption, including potential Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) implications and transition related failure at the commencement of a new contract.

- 4.2 From a value for money perspective, the current contract provides predictable costs and acceptable performance. Undertaking a full re-procurement would incur significant additional expenditure, including the likely engagement of external consultants (estimated at approximately £70,000), as well as substantial officer time, with no clear evidence that it would deliver improved value at this stage.
- 4.3 Strategically, while re-procurement can avoid committing the Council to a long-term delivery model, deferring this decision also allows the Council to maintain flexibility while the wider LGR landscape remains uncertain.
- 4.4 The more favourable option is to extend the current contract with Glendale by five years and renegotiate key areas, including the use of glyphosate. Other areas for review include grass cutting regimes, safety inspections, tree maintenance, play area remedial works, combined dog and litter waste collection, the highway agency agreement, alternative energy and environmental improvements, sports provision, pond and lake maintenance, and volunteer and public engagement initiatives.
- 4.5 There are three options regarding the use of glyphosate. The first is to discontinue its use as part of the retender process and to explore alternative methods of weed control through research and innovation.
- 4.6 The second option is to return the maintenance of footpaths, where glyphosate use is most prevalent, to Hertfordshire County Council, and consequently remove glyphosate from the contract.
- 4.7 Finally, we could continue using glyphosate for the Hertfordshire County Council contract where no viable alternatives exist. However, as part of the extension and renegotiation of the grounds maintenance contract, glyphosate use would be discontinued in the Council's parks and open spaces, with alternative methods employed instead.

5.0 Risks

- 5.1 If the grounds maintenance contract is not extended and is instead retendered, the procurement process would be resource-

intensive, requiring significant staff time. Additionally, the transition to a new contractor can be lengthy, potentially causing service disruptions and challenges due to a lack of familiarity with local areas and specific community needs.

- 5.2 Extending the current contract would be significantly more cost effective than retendering. The estimated fee for a consultant to review and update the contract documents, manage tenderers' queries, receive and evaluate tenders, and assist in the award process is approximately £50,000 to £70,000. Additional specialist input would also be required in areas such as legal, procurement, and finance.
- 5.3 Glendale is not contractually required to change its method of weed control during the term of the contract. Any additional costs arising from the withdrawal of glyphosate would need to be funded by the Council, as glyphosate remains a low-cost option compared to alternative weed control methods.
- 5.3 If the Council were to withdraw from carrying out weed control on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council, the County may continue managing weeds on footpaths using their own contractor. This would shift responsibility away from the District, but would not reduce overall glyphosate use. Effective control of weeds on highway footpaths supports the District's duty to maintain cleanliness and safety. Without such control, the District would likely need to allocate greater resources to mechanically manage weeds.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

The application of herbicide in public spaces is considered in the legislation and guidance, which must be followed by contractors and is monitored accordingly. The government has determined it is safe to use by way of granting license.

Data Protection

Nothing arising from this report.

Equalities

Nothing arising from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

The Council agreed objectives in the current Parks and Open Spaces Strategy to consider the environment.

Financial

Nothing arising at this time. The existing cost of the current contract is built into the Council's budget. If there are significant changes through the extension, this will need to be reviewed and factored in moving forward.

Health and Safety

Nothing arising from this report.

Human Resources

Nothing arising from this report.

Human Rights

Nothing arising from this report.

Legal

Legal and Procurement have been consulted, in principle, on the extension of the contract.

Specific Wards

All

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

Contact Member

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East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 20 January 2026

Report by: Councillor Sue Nicholls, Chair of Task and Finish Group

Report title: Scrutiny of Registered Providers' Communications Methods

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This is a report from the task and finish group agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review communication methods used by Registered Providers of housing in the district. This report makes recommendations for improvements to be put to the Executive for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- A. Consider and amend if required the recommendations made by the appointed Task and Finish Group found at paragraph 2.1; and
- B. Agree that the recommendations at paragraph 2.1, subject to any amendments, be forwarded to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods for consideration prior to the Executive Member's onward recommendations to the Executive.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed on the 16 September 2025 to establish a task and finish group to review the methods of communication used by Registered Providers (housing associations) to engage with their tenants, elected members and council officers. This area of scrutiny was driven by a wish to

identify actions that could result in tangible improvements to residents.

- 1.2 Task and Finish Group meetings were held on 29 October 2025, 17 November 2025, 4 December 2025 and 6 January 2026. Minutes for these meeting are shown in Appendix A.
- 1.3 There was varied engagement from registered providers, with some engaging fully in the process, others providing information to inform the recommendations made and some organisations not engaging. This highlighted the difficulties with communication experienced by some residents and members, which prompted this scrutiny exercise.
- 1.4 The Task and Finish Group were impressed with the information that was shared through the process by those who engaged. The Task and Finish Group expressed that the process had provided them with a greater understanding of the processes used by Registered Providers, the council and partners to provide services and support residents. Many examples of best practice were shared, and these have been used to inform the recommendations.
- 1.5 Scope for improvements in communication between the council and Citizens Advice Bureau were also identified during this work. This issue was outside of the remit of this review as were not specifically about housing services. Therefore, recommendations in terms of this area have not been included in this report but are being taken forward separately.
- 1.6 The Task and Finish Group also discussed how internal communications between council officers and members could be improved. There was discussion about if/when direct contact might be appropriate and the group suggested guidance on this. This was also felt to be outside of the remit of this review but proposed a future review into the effectiveness of member enquiries processes to consider this.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group identified a range of recommendations which were felt would improve communications

between Registered Providers, members and officers of the council.

These recommendations were divided into the key themes of contact information, information and training and on-going communication and engagement:

Theme - Contact Information	
Aim	Recommendation/s
1. Provide registered provider contacts for ward members and others, to assist with case work efficiency and effectiveness	Registered Providers to be asked to confirm up-to-date contact details for member enquiries. This would preferably include a neighbourhood management contact to provide the opportunity of relationship building at an estate level. Provide officers with up to date/dedicated contact details Consider also making this list available to Citizens' Advice to help improve communication and advocacy on behalf of tenants
2. Ensure residents have appropriate and up to date contact details for their providers to ensure that they are able to seek advice and support with any issues that they might have.	Work with Registered Providers to update housing association contacts for residents on East Herts website to ensure these are current. Ensure reasonable adjustments are made so that these details are available for everyone who needs them
3. Assist members with the identification of which registered providers manage specific areas	Produce a list of housing providers that have stock in the district, broken down into individual wards Explore if work can be undertaken to map housing providers in East Herts with links to their websites, as used for Arts in East Herts
4. Reduce multiple service specific	Work towards establishing and maintaining a shareable, centrally held spreadsheet of

contact lists for register provider contacts held by different council departments	property ownership and contacts details for Registered Providers operating in East Herts. Make sure that up to date and relevant information is easily accessible to different departments and registered provider partners to improve information gathering and communication. This will serve to reduce duplication and the need for internal sharing of details between different officers and departments.
5. Proactively establish good working relationships with providers new to East Herts	Require that appropriate and relevant contact details are provided by Registered Providers to enable them to engage effectively with key council services and members as early in the process as possible, setting expectations around this in as formal a way as is practicable.
Theme- Information and Training	
Aim	Recommendation
6. Help members to provide residents with the best support community concerns such as antisocial behaviour	<p>Provide advice to members about complaints standards and escalation processes which are common to all registered providers, including the role of the Ombudsman and advice about identifying if council officers are already aware of an issue to reduce duplication</p> <p>Provide advice/training on when it is appropriate to contact departments directly to discuss case work concerning registered providers and when it is preferable to use the members' Infreemation service</p> <p>Provide relevant contact details for different departments as necessary</p>
7. Ensure housing providers are aware of the processes in East Herts to support with community concerns like antisocial behaviour	Provide information and/or training to housing providers highlighting the partnership processes and services available in East Herts which they can access to help them support their tenants and deal with community concerns in a coordinated way

8. Increase the understanding of tenants about the standards they should expect	Review East Herts Council's website content, particularly considering changes under Renters' Rights Act, to provide clearer guidance to tenants and landlords about their rights and obligations. This work is already in progress and Task and Finish Group members would like to be involved in this work as it develops
Theme- Ongoing Communication and Engagement	
Aim	Recommendation
9. Provide all registered providers opportunities to engage with East Herts Council to develop and consolidate relationships	Consider developing a regular newsletter to all Registered Providers with housing stock in East Herts sharing information of interest to them about the council, including details of ward members and key officer contacts. It is also recommended that details of this review are shared with Registered Providers and asks for their comments and suggestions about opportunities to further improve communication
10. Make residents aware that improving communication is a priority	Communicate information about this review via the council's website and other means for those who are digitally excluded

2.2 It is proposed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee support these recommendations to the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 The Task and Finish Group has examined the evidence from a range of participants and developed recommendations in line with this evidence

4.0 Options

4.1 Accept the recommendations - RECOMMENDED for the reasons outlined above.

4.2 Not to accept the recommendations - NOT RECOMMENDED as the recommendations are being made to improve communications, which when not effective are a key driver of poor customer experience and dissatisfaction.

5.0 Risks

5.1 The remit of Overview and Scrutiny is to help review and improve services and functions run by the council and its local partners. A failure to consider ways to improve communications would be detrimental to members and tenants because this could result in reductions in the quality and effectiveness of services and poor customer experience. This can be mitigated by acting on all or some of the recommendations put forward at paragraph 2.1 of this report.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 Community Safety

a) Yes – the purpose of this review is to improve communication and customer experience and therefore would have a positive impact in terms of community safety as would ensure customer concerns are responded to at the earliest opportunity, preventing escalation of issues.

6.2 Data Protection

a) Yes – legislation prohibits disclosure of personal information. Those taking part in this work would be reminded that no personal information should be shared in the process of the review and guidance provided about the depersonalisation of data.

6.3 Equalities

a) Yes – the purpose of this review is to improve communication and therefore would have a positive impact on customer service standards. This is particularly important for groups who find communication more challenging. This review will consider equalities issues in the recommendations made.

6.4 Environmental Sustainability

a) None arising directly from this report.

6.5 Financial

- a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.6 Health and Safety
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.7 Human Resources
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.8 Human Rights
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.9 Legal
 - a) None arising directly from this report.
- 6.10 Specific Wards
 - a) None arising directly from this report.

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

- 7.1 Background Information: None
- 7.2 Appendices
 - a) Minutes from task and finish groups of 29 October 2025, 17 November 2025, 4 December 2025 and 6 January 2026.

Contact Member

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Appendix A

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2025, AT 3.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor S Nicholls (Chair), Councillors R Carter, S Marlow, and M Swainston

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Katherine Gilcreest - Housing Lead

1. APOLOGIES: None

2. Purpose of group and OCS agreed work programme

The Chair opened the Task & Finish Group by outlining the work programme agreed by OSC and the purpose of this work.

The Task and Finish Group discussed issues they were aware of where communication issues had led to reduced customer experience and the purpose of the group was to scrutinise how improvements could be made.

The Task and Finish Group discussed the scope of the review and discussed the partners who could provide insight into their experience and the benefit this would offer.

3. Analysis report of Housing Association responses

Katherine Gilcreest (KG) presented a report to the group outlining the response from the survey sent to registered providers about their current communication methods. The response rate to the survey was low but this was due to the methodology which only contacted organisations via the contact methods advertised on their websites. The group reviewed the survey and agreed the following:

Action/s:

KG to amend the survey to provide only yes or no options to questions 9 and 12 and include an additional question about the role of elected members

KG to re-circulate survey using the local contacts for organisations to increase response rate

KG to provide Task and Finish Group with a map at Ward level showing the Register Providers

4. Suggested expert witnesses

The group discussed who could provide information to the group to inform recommendations. The following agencies were highlighted as those who the Task & Finish Group would like to present information about current processes, areas of good practice and areas for improvement:

Environmental Health

Citizens Advice

Housing Regulator

Community Safety

1 large housing provider (proposed SNG)

2 smaller housing providers (Braughing Housing Association Limited and English Rural Housing Association Limited)

Action/s:

KG to contact the above and programme in for the following 2 meetings.

5. Dates of future meetings

Dates for the future Task and Finish Group meetings were agreed.

These were agreed as:

17 November, 3.00pm

4 December, 3.00pm

6 January, 3.00pm

The group agreed the meetings were preferable in person and should be in Wallfields.

Action/s:

KG to send invites to those organisations listed under item 4 for meetings scheduled in November and December with the January meeting held for the group to agree recommendations taken from the information presented.

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP
MEETING ROOM 1.15, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON WEDNESDAY
17 NOVEMBER 2025, AT 3.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor S Nicholls (Chair) Councillors R Carter, S Marlow, and M Swainston

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Katherine Gilcreest - Housing Lead

1. Apologies

There were no apologies

2. Update on approaches to partners and consider changes to programme

Katherine provided an update. Agreed to extend the time of the meeting on the 4 December to start at 2.00pm to enable more witnesses to attend

3. Expert witness- Environmental Heath

Witness was Nanci Pomfrett, Environmental Heath Officer who works on residential properties. Nanci began by giving an overview of the approaches well from a communications point of view. Gave the example of SNG, who have a nominated email box for environmental health notices. Where this isn't in place it will depend on those involved. Communication can be difficult when there is a change in staff or when it is an organisation that is not regularly worked with.

Nanci also said when her team get updates on cases this was really helpful. Most of her work is with surveyors and this could vary depending on the surveyor and their relationship. Nanci talked about her relationship with Clarion and this approach worked well in this model.

Cllr Nicholls asked about Ombudsman service. Nanci advised that they do not have much contact with the Ombudsman and they will tend to deal with providers direct.

Cllr Carter asked if private landlords in East Herts tend to be big or small? Nanci responded they are largely smaller landlords with 1 or 2 properties

Cllr Marlow asked about staff workloads and asked how quickly Environmental Health can get into properties. Nanci advised that this can depend on workloads but the key issue was on the speed of response from the landlord. They will always try to get in as quickly as possible.

Cllr Nicholls asked how big an issue is communication with providers? Nanci advised that most cases are Clarion and SNG due to their stock numbers and the age of their stock due to the stock transfer from the Council to them but they have strong relationships with both. Nanci also highlighted that Environmental Health are more likely to go down the enforcement route with RSLs as they are large organisations. Nanci advised it is common for the response to be about how the tenant is using the property. It was agreed that clearer instructions to tenants and landlords will help. This will be done through the website initially and then the advice can be promoted once website is updated.

Cllr Marlow asked about how Environmental Health see their relationship with housing providers, is this an enforcement role or more of teamwork? Nanci advised this can vary, but once there is a relationship it tends to evolve into a teamwork position. Ultimately it is about achieving a safe outcome for the tenant.

Cllr Carter asked about tracking of cases and how this is done. Nanci advised she would provide her case number to the housing provider and ask for their details and record these. Effectively both the housing provider and environmental health would have a case which each would track.

Cllr Nicholls asked what powers Environmental Health have to enforce things like Category 1 hazards. Nanci advised they most commonly use improvement notices as these are an effective way to get issues resolved. They can also use works in default, but these are rarely, if ever required. The most common Cat.1 hazards are damp and mould but the scale of the issues that are witnessed in the district are not the level of issues seen in the media in other areas.

There was a discussion about Section 21 Notices, as the Government has now announced the timetable for the Renters Rights reforms. These can be served up to 1 May 2026. There was a discussion about retaliatory evictions and whether the changes to legislation will have an impact on this. It was confirmed this is new legislation and staff were being trained. Members briefings on Renters Rights will be delivered in the New Year.

Members asked if they should be coming to Environmental Health before a direct approach to a housing provider. Nanci confirmed this would be helpful as they would have the information about what the landlord is doing and should be doing and will be able to offer advice about next steps

Cllr Swainston asked if Members can have some positive impact- as this has been effective with new developments in Stortford Fields where Member involvement has prompted improvements for residents. It was agreed by Nanci that Members can play an important role in advocating for residents and ensuring they get a good service.

Nanci advised that communication causes issue for advocates more generally. Professional's enquiries in-box which could include members are not routine, but where organisations have these, it makes it much easier.

There was a discussion about Members Enquiries work at the moment. It was discussed that Infreemation is helpful but it sometimes Members want to make a pre-enquiry of a service to see if a case is known and

the best approach. Nanci agreed to provide the Environmental Health email address so enquiries about whether cases are known can be directed here and then on response Members can decide if they need to log a Members enquiry.

Action: Nanci to circulate the EH general email (complete)
The in-box for Environmental Health is
Environmental.Health@eastherts.gov.uk

Members identified that a Providers Map would be useful, as it is not always clear who a specific property is owned by and residents do not always know who their landlord is.

Action: Creation of a provider's map
Cllr Carter asked about hoarding. Nanci advised they would use the Public Health Act. Mainly these are privately owned properties. These take a long time and lots of work needs to take place to build confidence. Use Public Health Act to remove the filthy waste. Mental Health issue. Often use the fire brigade as this builds trust. Cllr Marlowe mentioned there was previously a Hoarding Forum which was really useful but fell away and the only way to get support for complex cases. Katherine asked Nanci about Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM run by Hertfordshire CC) and Environmental Health links to this. EH not currently linked to this process, so this could be an area to be explored to ensure there is a partnership approach around complex cases which include hoarding. This is called a Team Around Me (TAM) approach and information about this can be found at [Making Every Adult Matter Approach and Team Around Me Guidance | Hertfordshire County Council](#)

4. Any other business

No further business

5. Close

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP
MEETING ROOM 1.15, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON 4 DECEMBER
2025, AT 3.00 PM**

PRESENT: Councillor S Nicholls (Chair) Councillors R Carter, S Marlow, and M Swainston

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Katherine Gilcreest - Housing, Julie Promfrett- Community Safety & ASB Manger, Katie Lewis- ASB Officer, Nanci Promfrett- Environmental Health, Elizabeth Lill- SNG, Jonathan Munger- SNG, Jane Wilson- Citizens Advice

1. Apologies and Introductions

No apologies

Councillor Sue Nicholls explained the background to the Task & Finish Group and the aims of the group. Councillor Nicholls went through the terms of reference for the group and thanked those who were in attendance for their involvement.

2. Community Safety and Antisocial Behaviour

Julie Promfrett and Katie Lewis presented to the Task & Finish Group the strengths and challenges with current communications between residents, Members, housing association and the Council in terms of their service. These were provided in a written document. The team also provided their suggestions for improvements which were:

- When housing associations new to the area take over a housing scheme that they are asked to provide direct contacts. It was asked if this could be included as a requirement through the s106/nominations agreement process
- That there is clarity on timescales for the response to complaints and other key issues, to save contact regarding when a response will be received
- They can offer training to housing associations on the processes used in East Herts for resolving community safety issues and the support available. This would include the ASBAG process being communicated before there are issues
- A Teams Channel to provide this information and ask for advice

Councillor Sue Nicholls asked what the Community Safety team felt the role of Members is. The Community Safety Team replied that their view is to support and sign-post and make them aware as quickly as possible.

Members also asked what if anything can be included in formal agreements with registered providers about expectations about their engagement with council services. Katherine Gilcreest agreed to get some advice about this from Legal and Planning colleagues.

3. SNG

Elizabeth Lill and Jonathan Munger attended from SNG and provided information about how SNG were responding to the challenge of improving communications with residents, councils and Members. Their general approach is that while they are a national organisation they work on a neighbourhood level. Their presentation was circulated.

Members asked them what SNG saw as the key challenges to communications. SNG responded that there have been 5 key issues for them:

1. Restructure- moving to SNG means that they are now an organisation with over 80,000 homes and while this comes with massive benefits it can cause challenges in terms of

communication. SNG have an engagement model based on a localities structure and their office in Hertford means that largely the restructure has had as little impact as possible, but there have been issues with staff changes. The restructure is now complete though, so this is positive

2. Customers with complex needs- SNG are seeing a greater proportion of customers who have very complex needs and are aware that resources are limited across partners who are needed to support these customers, particularly mental health and adult social care services. This is having a knock-on impact on service delivery and the time taken to resolve cases and get customers the support they need
3. Court delays- there are long wait times which often causes customer frustration but outside of the control of the housing provider.
4. Repairs- SNG have recently changed their repairs and maintenance contractor and there has been a period of imbedding of the new processes. Weekly contract monitoring meetings have been taking place and performance is starting to improve, but this has caused issues. There are plans to use technology to enable tenants to raise, track and rate the repairs service which are not in place yet, but will see an improvement to resident experience when implemented.
5. Phone waiting times- there have been 5 new starters in the customer service team who are now trained and taking calls, which has had a positive impact on wait times. A further 6 new staff have been recruited and once trained will improve this further.

Members asked about the different contact methods customers use to contact SNG and SNG advised they can do this via phone, email, My Portal and they have a dedicated Complaints and Member Enquiry email. The Member email was shared which is MemberEnquiriesSNH@sng.org.uk It was acknowledged by officers that customer confidence is impacted by past experience.

Councillor Marlow asked about if SNG were using AI in their communications with residents? Jonathan advised that SNG are using a live chat facility in repairs to help triage reports, but most calls are chasing jobs which have already been raised. The live mapping of repairs is due to be delivered by contractors but not in place yet and this will help with this issue.

Councillor Carter asked about what would constitute a dementia friendly

approach for SNG and whether staff had received any specific training. Elizabeth responded that staff had received 'slipping through the net training' designed to identify, record and refer residents where there were concerns to specialist support.

Members also asked if SNG felt they had enough opportunities to promote good practice and learn from others. Elizabeth responded that they take part in many partnership meetings, but these are often focused on a single resident and more about case management. SNG would welcome this opportunity.

4. Housing Ombudsman and Regulator of Social Housing

Katherine Gilcreest explained that the Housing Ombudsman responded to complaints from customers about specific service delivery issues while the Regulator of Social Housing was responsible for the regulation of registered housing providers (register social landlords/housing associations) through an inspection and compliance regime at an organisational level.

The RSH provided some video links about their work and how they carryout their regulation function. The links to these are:

<https://youtu.be/cQLz3JnC2dA> what the RSH does

<https://youtu.be/vzmRVvNulyI> how to make a referral

The Housing Ombudsman also provided a video about their service and how they investigate complaints escalated to them when a customer feels their complaint has not been resolved to their satisfaction by the housing provider:

The Housing Ombudsman <https://youtu.be/cR7pnYt5eQs>

The Ombudsman also provided a presentation about research they completed which identified that communications were a key issue in around 68% of complaints investigated by the Ombudsman. This research also identified the areas organisations should consider when wanting to improve their communications with residents. This research has been shared.

The RSH and Ombudsman Service have provided a contact for the Task & Finish Group to raise any further questions they have about their work.

5. CAB

Councillor Sue Nicholls explained the terms of reference for the Task & Finish Group and that the group was looking at recommendations to improve communications for the benefit of residents

Jane Wilson from CAB advised that their key concern is communications with the Council and the call waiting time for housing providers. CAB have no dedicated advisor lines or methods of contact. Jane reported that CAB face a 7 week wait for email response from the council in response to enquiries and often face issues relating to requiring an authority to discuss. Many of the enquiries relate to benefit and council tax enquiries. CAB also face the challenge that call handlers can't answer the enquiry and need to pass this on. This is difficult when CAB have a client with them, and they are unable to provide advice as they can't do simple things like confirm benefit entitlement or council tax arrears. Jane also explained that CAB sees customers who are struggling with making on-line applications and the office not being open every day means they are unable to get the support they need. CAB have a positive relationship with Trinity Night Shelter though, which is positive. The action which would help the most would be an agreement that CAB could use conference call facility and join meetings with customers, so customers could give their authority in real time and issues were dealt with quickly.

Members were concerned about what they were hearing and felt more should be done to support CAB as they are a funded service and a vital service for lots of residents. It was discussed that the proposition about office space at Wallfields was currently under discussion and would improve communication greatly. It was also agreed that direct contacts would be shared with CAB for the most common areas of enquiries. It was also agreed Jane would share the email addresses CAB are currently using which have long response times, so discussions could be had within the council about how this could be improved. Councillor Nicholls advised that although council tax and housing benefit enquiries were outside of the remit of the Task & Finish Group these issues were important to resolve. It was also suggested that CAB could be invited to ASBAG to improve relationships and awareness of other organisations who can offer support to customers. There is also the upcoming Rents Rights coordination group which could be helpful in this regard and CAB had already been identified as a key partner- KG to explore these options with the Community Safety Team and Environmental Health Team who lead on these forums.

6. Any other business and next steps

Last meeting of the Task & Finish Group scheduled for Tuesday 6 January 3.30pm-5.00pm. Invite Jonathan Geall

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP

MEETING ROOM Lea Room, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON 6 JANUARY 2026, AT 3.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor S Nicholls (Chair) Councillors R Carter, S Marlow, and M Swainston

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Katherine Gilcreest - Housing

7. Apologies and Introductions

No apologies.

8. Terms of Reference

Councillor Sue Nicholls reviewed the terms of reference with the group, to ensure that any recommendations were in-line with the agreed remit.

9. Reflections from meetings

All agreed that it had been a worthwhile process and been enlightening. Speaking to officers and those who engaged has been interesting. Very surprising how many housing providers there were in East Herts, which brings challenges in terms of communications, differing processes and building relationships.

CAB raised issues with communication and relationship which were outside the scope of the review but important to resolve. Discussion around seeking further information from providers who did not respond to the survey. Maybe providing a copy of the report to those who didn't engage. All agreed that this work should be part of an on-going conversation.

Councillor Marlow want to establish relationships with officers on the ground and to do this needed up to date contacts. The first recommendation should be a letter out to all providers again requesting how members can contact to resolve case work and resident enquiries and to build positive working relationships.

Councillor Nicholls wanted to ensure the expectations around clear communications were part of contracts and formal agreements with providers. Councillor Nicholls also wanted to have expectations around vulnerable people and the forecasting of future issues

Councillor Carter raised the issue of mapping and that it is still challenging for members to know which provider is responsible for a particular development or home. It would be helpful to use technology to map where providers have stock and link to providers contact details and information, which would be a good way to limit the need of constant review of contact information.

10. Recommendations for OSC

The Chair of the group highlighted all the recommendations made through the previous meetings. These included:

1. Make members aware of the Ombudsman service and information available regarding complaints service to assist dealing with intractable issues
2. Contact all providers to establish a named neighbourhood contact for officers, members and key partners
3. A training offer to registered providers about East Herts processes and procedures so providers can use the support of members, council officers and partners to support residents and resolve issues. A key example of this is the Antisocial Behaviour Action Group which is well used by many housing providers to coordinate work around community issues but often participation is in response to an issue, which limits the opportunity for preventative work

4. That steps to improve communication are included in formal agreements with providers new to East Herts so there are clear expectations about who providers should engage with from the start
5. Engagement with developers so it is clear as early as possible who is likely to be managing new developments, so relationships can be developed
6. Encourage register provider involvement in multi-agency meetings, even if they have no current cases. Examples of these included the Antisocial Behaviour Action Group where understanding the process can help identify preventative and proactive work. There should also be groups where providers can be involved which are not case specific, like the Renters Rights Coordination Group, and the promotion/use of groups like this could help to strengthen relationships and encourage joint work
7. The member and registered provider meetings with Clarion and SNG are welcome mechanisms to work through issues and share updates, but it is unlikely to be practical to do this with all providers operating in East Herts at a Council level. Suggestion of developing a newsletter for registered providers with useful information about others working in East Herts (including ward members) and publicising methods of engagement and relationship building
8. There are many different contact lists for registered providers held across council teams, depending on the service area. This means that officers are often contacted by other officers asking for a contact. One spreadsheet about property ownership in East Herts held on Teams which officers can access would reduce unnecessary contact and escalation
9. Improve the current housing association contact list held on the East Herts website to make this more user friendly for residents and members. Develop an online mapping tool showing where estates are owned by specific registered providers, linking to their websites so contact details remain current
10. Share findings and report with all housing providers so there is a understand of the issues
11. Communication to residents so they are aware that this issue has been highlighted as one of importance to members and to publicise the steps being proposed to improve communication
12. Provide clear guidance on tenant's rights on the East Herts website, particularly considering the changes due to the Renters Rights Act. Changes to the website are in train due to Renters Right already and changes to make the website more user friendly

were endorsed by the task and finish group who would like to be involved in this work as it develops

It was recognised by the Task & Finish Group that it was necessary to improve communication processes between Citizen's Advice and the council. Communications had become largely via email which was difficult in terms of responsiveness and did not result in the good working relationship which was desired. Suggestions included council staff attending sites to meet jointly, use of joint conference calls with residents, colocation, the sharing of housing provider details, involving CAB in Renters Rights Coordination Group and ASBAG to improve communications and joint work. It was recognised that this issue was outside the scope of this review and therefore would be taken forward separately

It was recognised by the Task & Finish Group that improvements to communication would most likely be achieved by practical measures.

It was also recognised that all service providers need to consider those residents with additional needs who need reasonable adjustments. It was emphasised that a key role of Members is to advocate for residents, particularly those least able to support themselves. This can be achieved by providing advice to Members. In the area of Environmental Health for example it was advised to check with the team if a case was known/open to them before approaching a registered provider. The Task & Finish Group said that as members they would welcome training and clarification in terms of service areas which generate higher volumes of enquiries to aid them in their casework. The Chair provided an example of a service charge enquiry to a housing provider where intervention resulted in a reduction of that charge, but this approach was only due to having dealt with a similar issue the previous year. It would be positive to have a mechanism to share this learning.

The Task & Finish Group also discussed how internal communications between officers and members could be improved. There was discussion about if/when direct contact might be appropriate and the group suggested guidance on this. This was also felt to be outside of the remit of this review but wanted to raise the suggestion of a future review into the effectiveness of member enquiries processes to consider this.

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 20 January 2026

Report By: Chairman Of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Title: Overview And Scrutiny Committee - Draft Work Programme

Ward(S) Affected: All Wards

Summary

- This report considers topics for inclusion in the Committee's Draft Work Programme. By establishing a work programme of topics for scrutiny Members are better able to plan their future workload, with an agenda which is focussed, maximising the efficacy of the scrutiny process by taking a longer term, strategic view of the issues facing the council.
- A list of topics is detailed in **Appendix A**.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(A) That the work Programme at Appendix 1, be agreed.

1.0 Background

1.1 **Appendix 1** sets out the Draft Work Programme which may be reviewed at any time. Members are reminded to complete the scrutiny proposal form when putting forward an item for the draft work programme.

1.2 A key function of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Executive to account for its decisions, to review existing policies and consider proposals for new policies. In doing so, it will act as the Executive's critical friend in the process. The principle power of scrutiny is to influence policies and decisions made by the Council. Its aim should be to achieve positive outcomes for local people by undertaking a thorough targeted

examination of the council's services and procedures and make recommendations for improvement.

- 1.3 It has no formal powers to make changes but where a recommendation is made to the Executive, and the Executive is required to respond to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if it decides not to accept a recommendation and the rationale for that decision. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) recommends that the Executive has to respond to any recommendation within two months.

2.0 Update

- 2.1 Topics for scrutiny at the following meetings are detailed below and are also set out in Appendix 1.
 - 10 March 2026
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met for a workshop on Thursday 27 March 2025, to discuss potential topics for scrutiny on the work programme for 2025/26. The Executive were invited to attend to share any upcoming matters they may have that the Committee might like to scrutinise.
- 2.3 The following topics are in the work programme for scrutiny in 2025/26, some of these topics need to be refined via a scrutiny proposal form:
 - Re-tender of the grounds maintenance contract (Glyphosate)
 - Scrutiny of Registered Providers Communication Methods
 - Sustainable Transport
 - Artificial Intelligence and its use by the Council
 - Parking Strategy Progress report
 - Local Government Reform
 - The council's approach to achieving net zero carbon by 2030
- 2.4 All new up and coming strategies and policies will automatically be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, and Members of Overview and Scrutiny can then consider whether they wish to look at these as part of the work programme.

3.0 Reason

3.1 Members are welcome, and are encouraged, to submit a scrutiny proposal at any time. This form is available in the Microsoft Teams channel and provides Officers with sufficient information to assess if it is appropriate for scrutiny and to ensure that specific questions are addressed. A Scrutiny Flowchart is also available which explains the processes involved in submitting a Scrutiny Proposal Form. Democratic Services will then liaise with Officers and the Chairman to consider the best way forward to address the subject and complete the scoping document.

4.0 Options

4.1 The work programme will be kept under review by the Committee throughout the coming year.

5.0 Risks

5.1 The establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee is enshrined in the Local Government Act 2000 (Section 9). The 2000 Act obliges local authorities to adopt political management systems with a separate Executive. Various sub sections of the 2000 Act set out the powers and duties for Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the right to investigate and make recommendations on anything which is the responsibility of the Executive. Legislative provisions can also be found in the Localism Act 2011 (Schedule 2) with options to retain or re-adopt a “committee system” Section 9B.

5.2 Potential risks arise for the council if policies and strategies are developed and / or enacted without sufficient scrutiny. Approval of an updated work programme contributes to the mitigation of risk (and Call-Ins) by ensuring key activities of the council are scrutinised.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

Yes - the proposed Work Programme envisages the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving reports on the progress of the council's environmental strategies.

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

Yes - scrutiny is enshrined in statute (the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011)

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix 1 - Summary of Topics

Contact Member: Councillor David Jacobs, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
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Programme of Proposed Scrutiny Topics

Topic	Corporate Objectives (LEAF)	Questions/concerns	Scrutiny Approach (Bulletin, Report, rapid review or task and finish group)	Background Notes / Officers' comments	Reporting timeframe
AI and its use by the Council			Report	Suggestion by Cllr Carter for a summary bulletin, now superseded by a full report due in March 2026	March 2026
Local Government Reform			Report	Scrutiny Proposal Forms submitted by Cllrs E Buckmaster and G McAndrew	March 2026
Sustainable Transport			Report	Topic is to be narrowed down via a scrutiny proposal form; the topic will be delayed to June 2026 if a form is not submitted by the 20 January meeting	March 2026
Parking Strategy progress report					March 2026
The council's approach to achieving net zero carbon by 2030				Scrutiny Proposal Form submitted by Cllr T Hoskin (Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability)	March 2026
					June 2026
					September 2026
					November 2026
					January 2027
					March 2027