

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

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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**

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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

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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

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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.

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The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chairman .....

Date .....