

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillor K Crout (Chair)
Councillors K Hastrick, A Joynes, A Khan, R Martins, A Rindl,
D Walford and S Williams

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

68 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Due to the absence of the Chair and Vice-Chair the Scrutiny Committee was invited to appoint a Chair for this meeting.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Crout be elected Chair for this meeting.

69 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Martins replaced Councillor Collett and Councillor S Williams replaced Councillor Dhindsa.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Topping.

70 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interests.

71 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2016 were submitted and signed.

72 CALL-IN

It was noted that no Executive decisions had been called in.

OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Scrutiny Committee received a list of outstanding actions and questions. Members noted the updates.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Culture and Play Section Head had provided an update on the requested information about the Big Skate. Unfortunately it had been received after the publication of the agenda. She would ensure it was circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.

CS4 – Number of households in temporary accommodation

Councillor Martins noted the responses to the three questions from the November 2015 meeting. He considered there was a potential for an increase in homelessness. He asked how this would be monitored.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head responded that the last few years had been very difficult with regards to this matter. The Interim Housing Section Head had worked to address the matter of temporary accommodation and had sought more permanent solutions. Officers had been working on two or three initiatives to support the supply of accommodation. This was not a matter that could easily be solved or quick resolutions found. The new Housing Section Head was due to start very shortly. He had previously worked at Coventry City Council and had good experience.

Councillor S Williams questioned when the homeless strategy had been introduced and whether it would be possible to do a review part way through the strategy's life.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head believed that the 2015-2020 strategy had been agreed in December 2014.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she would be arranging a meeting with the Head of Community and Customer Services to discuss potential topics for next year's work programme. She would raise the Councillor's suggestion with the Head of Service.

Councillor Joynes commented that due to changes to benefits and benefit support some people would be unable to afford their rent. She questioned what would happen to these people.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that Discretionary Housing Payments could be applied for in those cases where the resident was unable to pay any outstanding rent once their housing benefit had been assessed.

Councillor S Williams suggested it might be an idea to scrutinise Watford Community Housing Trust and the rents it charged to its tenants.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the Council was able to scrutinise external organisations where they had an impact on residents. However any recommendations from a Task Group could only be suggestions to an external organisation. Scrutiny did not have the power to require an organisation to take any action. Previously a Task Group had been set up to scrutinise the Housing Trust and its repairs procedures. The Housing Trust had worked with the Task Group and provided information as requested. They had also visited Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provided updates on the implementation of the recommendations, where it was possible to do so.

ED 8 Release of covenant for land at Leggatts Campus

Councillor Khan commented that he had not heard whether he would be allowed to view the report supporting the decision on the release of covenant for land at Leggatts Campus.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that she had forwarded the Councillor's written request, setting out his 'need to know' to the Legal and Democratic Section Head and was waiting for a response.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

74

UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MEASURES (IN-HOUSE SERVICES) - QUARTER 3 (OCTOBER - DECEMBER) 2015/16

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head setting out the results of the performance measures for the in-house services for Quarter 3 in 2015/16.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head highlighted some of the key points within the report. She mentioned that the planning service would be reviewing its indicators as those contained within the report were national indicators.

CS7 – Number of people sleeping rough on a single night within the area of the local authority

Councillor Crout asked for clarification of 'rough sleepers', as he had heard that people were not counted unless they were prostrate.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that the person was counted if they were 'bedding down' for the night – this did not mean they had to be lying down necessarily. The national count always took place in November. However New Hope undertook regular counts and the numbers varied considerably over the year.

Councillor Rindl commented that her husband had taken part in the count this year. It was always carried out at the same time of the year. During the summer there could be more people sleeping rough.

Affordable homes

Councillor S Williams noted the Regeneration and Development performance measures and asked whether a record was kept of the total number of affordable properties.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that CS3, affordable homes on identified sites, made reference to the number of properties on individual schemes. She cautioned that in some cases developers did look for ways they could avoid affordable housing requirements. They were known to state that schemes would not be viable if they were required to include the specified amount of affordable units.

CS2 Improved street and environmental cleanliness

Councillor Joynes commented that she was aware of an ongoing fly tipping matter on a service road in her ward, just off St Albans Road.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she had witnessed fly tipping on a service road off St Albans Road. She had reported it to the relevant officer. The service road was not classed as public highway and therefore there were restrictions on the Council's ability to clear the waste. However, if there was a risk of vermin the Council had powers to be able to go on to the private road and clear the rubbish.

Councillor Khan suggested that a scrutiny could be carried out on the subject of unadopted roads. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer responded that the Councillor was welcome to submit an application.

CS5 Number of private sector units secured for use under HomeLet

Councillor Martins noted the new landlord incentive package. He asked how the Council managed the landlords and tenants. In his opinion people living in rented accommodation did not have regard to their local community. He questioned how the Council monitored those who had entered into a contract.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head reported that a HomeLet survey had been carried out, however, there had been very little response. If people had a positive experience they were more likely to continue letting their accommodation through HomeLet. If someone had a bad experience they were less likely to carry on.

Councillor Martins felt that the Council should not be 'soft' with the landlords. He suggested that if Ward Councillors were aware of the HomeLet properties, the councillors would be able to check them.

CS9 Long waits for calls received to CSC

Following a question from Councillor Rindl, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head confirmed that the arrow should have pointed upwards, as the trend was moving in the right direction.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head added that she had received the results for CS12, average waiting times in the CSC for Revenues and Benefits enquiries. The information would be circulated after the meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. that the performance of the Council's performance measures for those areas where the Council directly delivers the service / area of work at the end of Quarter 3 2015/16 be noted.
2. that the information regarding the average waiting times in the CSC for Revenues and Benefits enquiries be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.

75

EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report 2015/16.

Councillor Joynes asked for clarification about which bowls club was referred to on the last page of the report.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer stated she was not aware and would need to contact the relevant officers for further information.

Councillor Rindl referred to the decision about the Council modernising its branding, which had been considered by the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services in October. She asked how much it would cost and what it would entail.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer noted that the decision was listed as non-key. This meant it would have cost below £50,000; as the key decision limit was income or expenditure of £50,000 and above.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

76

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Kareen Hastrick, the Council's appointed representative to the Health Scrutiny Committee, informed the Scrutiny Committee that there had been no further meetings since the last one in January.

Councillor Joynes, a member of the County Council's Care Quality Commission Report Monitoring of West Hertfordshire Hospitals Trust Scrutiny Topic Group, provided a brief update. She would ensure that the minutes were circulated.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted

77

SCRUTINY PROPOSAL - NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer setting out the details of a suggestion for a scrutiny Task Group on Neighbourhood Forums.

Members discussed the proposal submitted by the Head of Democracy and Governance and how there might be different ways Neighbourhood Forums could be carried out.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer acknowledged the comments and advised that if the Task Group were to be agreed, the management of locality funding in other local authorities would be included in the review. If the Scrutiny Committee agreed to the Task group, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer would seek expressions of interest from non-executive councillors after the local elections on 5 May 2016.

RESOLVED –

that a Task Group be established to review Neighbourhood Forums, commencing in the new Municipal Year, 2016/17.

78

MANAGEMENT OF CONSERVATION AREAS TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer which contained the Management of Conservation Areas Task Group's final report and recommendations. The report was due to be presented to Council on 7 March.

Councillor Martins explained why he had proposed conservation areas as a subject for scrutiny. The recommendations had been put under a number of

headings. He suggested that the management of conservation areas could become a regular review item on Overview and Scrutiny Committee's agenda.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer responded that there would be a role for this Scrutiny Committee as it reviewed the Task Group's recommendations and whether they were being implemented. A report would be presented to the next meeting which would provide Cabinet's response. The Scrutiny Committee would then be able to decide when it wanted to carry out its first review.

Councillor Martins acknowledged the officer's comments but felt there needed to be continuous monitoring.

Councillor Martins added that since the Task Group had taken place he was aware that additional areas were interested in having a designated conservation area.

Councillor Khan referred to a discussion at Planning Policy Advisory Group about this matter. He mentioned that it was relevant to areas of historical significance. The Harebreaks Estate was a pre-runner to the Garden City Estates. However due to changes to the buildings they could not be included within a conservation area. He said that he was interested in finding out what could be made a conservation area.

Following a question from Councillor Rindl, Councillor Martins said that the Task Group had shown that his initial concerns were legitimate. One of his objectives had been to heighten awareness of conservation areas, which he believed had been achieved.

RESOLVED –

that the Management of Conservation Areas Task Group's final report be agreed.

79

BUDGET PANEL

Councillor Khan, Chair of Budget Panel, stated that the Panel had reviewed the latest Finance Digest and a detailed overview of the Council's policy regarding the treatment of outstanding debts.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

80

OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

Councillor Crout, Chair of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Panel had received the annual parking report. The

Panel had also looked at the latest performance measures for the outsourced services.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

81 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

It was noted that no meetings had taken place since the last Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 22 March 2016.

82 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- Wednesday 23 March 2016 (for call-in only)

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.20 pm