

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 January 2017

Present: Councillor K Hastrick (Chair)
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)
Councillors J Fahmy, Asif Khan, R Martins, A Rindl, D Walford and
T Williams

Also present: Councillor Karen Collett (for minute numbers 61 to 66)
Councillor Stephen Johnson (for minute numbers 61 to 66)
Bob Jones, CEO of Watford and Three Rivers Trust (for
minute numbers 61 to 64)
Debbie Bezalel, Director of CVS at Watford and Three Rivers
Trust (for minute numbers 61 to 64)
Nicky Fawcett, Deputy CEO of Watford and Three Rivers Trust
(for minute numbers 61 to 64)
Brigid Larmour, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of
Watford Palace Theatre (for minute numbers 61 to 64)
Jamie Arden, Executive Director at Watford Palace Theatre
(for minute numbers 61 to 64)

Officers: Head of Community and Customer Services
Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head (for
minute numbers 61 to 65)
Culture and Community Section Head (for minute numbers 61 to
65)
Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

61 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Mauthoor replaced Councillor Shah.

62 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interests.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2016 were submitted and signed.

Commissioning Framework: Watford and Three Rivers Trust and Watford Palace Theatre

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head stated that following the report at the last meeting on the Commissioning Framework, different organisations would be invited to speak to the scrutiny committee about their role as a commissioned organisation. At this meeting representatives were present from Watford and Three Rivers Trust and Watford Palace Theatre. At the next meeting it was proposed to invite representatives from Shopmobility and Citizens Advice Watford. In the new municipal year representatives from the community centre would be invited to a meeting.

Watford and Three Rivers Trust

Bob Jones, the CEO of Watford and Three Rivers Trust, provided information about the background of the Trust and its role. He also explained about the voluntary sector in Watford.

Debbie Bezalel, the Director of Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), expanded on the work the trust carried out with local charities and groups. The trust helped groups to identify their needs and how to become sustainable. They assisted groups to develop business plans and find funding sources.

Bob Jones informed the scrutiny committee that the trust had recently launched a new suite of websites. The trust was also able to help groups develop their own websites. The trust hosted Herts.Community, which included a social network platform. He added that he would ensure all councillors would be sent an invite to join the network.

Following a question from the Chair about the council's small grants fund, Debbie Bezalel confirmed the trust supported organisations with their applications; ensuring the application form included the right information. There were occasions when the Small Grants team would refer a group to the trust for assistance.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head stated that until recently only constituted groups were able to make applications to the small grants fund. However this had recently changed and non-constituted groups

could apply with Watford and Three Rivers Trust acting as their 'banker', who provided them with support and access to the funding.

Councillor Dhindsa congratulated the trust on its work with small groups who did not have a constitution. He said that he felt the voluntary sector had died down over the years. He asked how the trust engaged with the voluntary sector, particularly those from the black and minority ethnic (BME) community. He understood that many in this community were not aware of the small grants fund.

Bob Jones commented that the sector had changed a lot over the years and he felt that the voluntary sector had possibly increased over the last 10 years. He advised that an analysis of Watford's voluntary sector had been carried out and aligned against the nine equality characteristics set out in the Equality Act. It appeared that the BME community was struggling. The trust contacted known groups to try to assist them; however he was aware that some groups had ceased to exist. Outreach work had been carried out in the Muslim community. The trust wanted to work with everyone and help the different communities.

Debbie Bezalel mentioned some of the BME groups she had worked with, including the Gurdwara, Multi Cultural Community Centre, the Polish Saturday School, the Portuguese group and the Italian Society. There was a good relationship with members of the Hindu community. A regular newsletter was circulated highlighting services, including the small grants fund. The team was happy to meet any group.

Councillor Dhindsa suggested it would be useful if councillors could be given further information about the help the trust had given to BME groups, how it had engaged with them and the type of outreach work the trust carried out. He added that the trust could contact the local councillors who may be able to provide contact information for different groups.

Councillor Martins asked if it was possible to explain the difference between the trust and CVS and how they interacted. He had been struck by the level of volunteering in Watford and enquired whether the trust supported volunteers.

Bob Jones explained that support for volunteers was the responsibility of the organisations. Some of the organisations were very good but some did struggle. The role of the trust was to support the organisations. The trust was part of Team Herts which promoted good quality volunteer management. There was also a collective volunteering agreement which provided back office support.

Bob Jones explained that the difference in the names was more likened to a re-branding. Previously he constantly had to explain what was meant by

community and voluntary services. When considering a new name it was felt 'community trust' was more appropriate. Underneath the parent brand of the trust there were various projects including the CVS.

Councillor Collett, Portfolio Holder responsible for community, informed the scrutiny committee that she had visited many BME groups and had told them about the small grants fund. In addition she advised them to contact the team if they had any problems. She had done a radio interview on Three Counties radio and referred to the small grants fund. She had been working with the Trust and it had been agreed that all councillors would be invited to the next Board meeting on 1 February to find out more about the trust and its work.

Councillor Mauthoor thanked the trust for their fantastic work and was pleased to hear the portfolio holder's comments. She asked that councillors were provided with more information about the trust at their induction as she felt she could have told different groups about the trust.

In response to a comment from Councillor Khan about outreach work, Debbie Bezalel explained that the team worked across the community, including with residents groups, older people and younger people. As part of its duty to the council it reported back on a quarterly basis of the work it was doing. They did not focus on one specific area; they worked with small and large groups. They helped groups to find funding to meet their needs. If councillors were aware of a group who may need support they could contact her or Bob Jones, who would then be able to assist the group and point them in the right direction.

Watford Palace Theatre

Brigid Larmour, Artistic Director and Chief Executive, and Jamie Arden, Executive Director of Watford Palace Theatre gave a presentation about the work of Watford Palace Theatre and some key statistics.

Councillor Dhindsa congratulated the organisation on its excellent work and the great strides it had made with the Watford community.

Councillor Mauthoor thanked the organisation for its work. She had had the opportunity to participate in the community event, 'Hello, Mister Capello' at the theatre. She asked whether the theatre carried out any outreach work in schools.

Jamie Arden responded that schools were considered to be extremely important and the organisation was working on ways to strengthen those links. More schools had attended this year's pantomime than in previous years. Auditions were held in schools across Hertfordshire for the Herts Youth Theatre which was

based at Watford Palace Theatre. The theatre would continue to find ways to strengthen this work for the future.

Brigid Larmour added that due to funding cuts by the county council not as many workshops were carried out in schools. However, the youth theatre production work continued.

Councillor Martins commented that Watford Palace Theatre was the jewel in Watford's crown. When he had rotary guests visiting Watford they had often heard of the theatre. It was the living theatre of the town. He felt that Brigid's work should be acknowledged. It was a real showcase for the arts. However, it was a shame the youth work had reduced.

Brigid Larmour explained that there were three youth groups each week and the Youth Theatre continued. The theatre reached out to a range of age groups, encouraging participation. The 'Hello, Mister Capello' production brought different people together. The theatre intended to produce a community play every other year which would bring together diverse communities.

Councillor Khan asked if there were any areas the Artistic Director felt the theatre could improve.

Brigid Larmour advised that both she and her team had been asking themselves the same question. One area for improvement would be to raise funding and sponsorship from the local business community and finding donors. It was also felt that there had been some loss of the traditional theatre audience due to the newer work that had been introduced. This had led to a mix of traditional and new works included in the programme. The theatre had also improved in the analysis of the data it collected.

Jamie Arden added that comedy had been re-introduced. The theatre wanted to reach different types of audiences. They would also look at more ways they could go out into the community with events similar to the Big Events and Imagine Watford.

Councillor Khan commented that the theatre attracted people who lived outside Watford. He noted the comments about sponsors and asked how they could justify the benefits of the theatre to taxpayers compared to other services which were being cut.

Brigid Larmour responded that the theatre could change people's perception of the town. Socio-economic inclusion would be an important factor in the theatre's work over the next three or four years. The theatre was an active agent for community cohesion. She regularly visited other theatres, including

London, and it was not possible to limit visitors. She said that she believed in a creative sector; it enhanced people's lives. Ticket pricing was set at an entry level and compared well as shown in the presentation. Watford Palace Theatre was one of five most accessible priced theatres in the country.

Following a question from Councillor Williams about challenges ahead for the theatre, Brigid Larmour advised that the most significant was funding. Another was to ensure the theatre remained relevant.

Jamie Arden added that it was necessary to consider ways the theatre could be sustainable in the future. The next business plan would include information about how the theatre could diversify income; encouraging more people to visit the theatre and spending once there. It was intended to develop corporate sponsorship. They would have a dialogue with Watford's business community and show the value of culture in the town. They would be able to show the positive impact Imagine Watford had on businesses in the town. The theatre could be shared with other groups and organisations. During the summer groups could hire the theatre to showcase their own events. The theatre wanted to be part of the town and support the council.

Councillor Dhindsa noted Councillor Khan's comments and asked whether a membership scheme could be introduced for residents providing them discounts to shows.

Councillor Martins commented that he saw the funding to the theatre as an investment by the council. It was important to look at the theatre in a wider context. The theatre brought people into the town and encouraged community cohesion.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head said that he regularly attended Board meetings. The Chair of the Palace Theatre Trust was from Warner Brothers. Another board member worked at the BBC. The types of people drawn to be part of the theatre gave the council confidence that direction and innovation was there.

Councillor Mauthoor suggested it might be useful to consider introducing a multi-ticket giving access to the theatre, Warner Brothers Studio and Watford football club.

The Chair thanked all the guest speakers for their presentations and taking time to respond to councillors' questions.

RESOLVED –

1. that Watford and Three Rivers trust provides information about the various groups it has helped.
2. that an email be circulated to all councillors to enable them to sign up to the Trust's newsletter.
3. that information about Watford and Three Rivers Trust be given to new councillors at their induction.

65

Watford Borough Council Safeguarding Overview

The scrutiny committee received a report and associated documents of the Culture and Play Section Head. It explained the role and responsibilities of the council in relation to safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults.

The Culture and Play Section Head gave an overview of the council's role and how it referred matters of concern to the county council, who made the decision on the next steps to be followed. Watford Borough Council would be carrying out a review of its policies and procedures; any recommendations would be presented to Leadership Team.

Councillor Rindl commented that as she worked in a school she was very aware of safeguarding. She had found the e-learning course very interesting. She asked for clarification about the audit report and if the council had improved since the moderate assessment.

The Culture and Play Section Head explained that following the audit by the Shared Internal Audit Service, an action plan was produced. In response to the comments about the e-learning course, he stated that officers were planning an all-member training session on safeguarding.

The Head of Community and Customer Services added that the Section 11 audit was carried out annually and reported to the county council. Officers had asked the Shared Internal Audit Service to carry out the audit in order to get an overview of the council's response.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head advised that the action plan showed officers' progress against the actions required as part of the audit report. She considered that if the council was re-assessed it would have surpassed the moderate assessment as the actions identified as necessary and best practice had been undertaken. A further audit would not at this stage serve a purpose but the review being planned would further scrutinise this area of

work to enable further improvements. Part of the reason for the review was to take account of potential emerging issues, including preventing violent extremism. Safeguarding needed to be embedded in to the council's work and best practice shared. It was important to ensure the correct policies and procedures were in place.

Following a comment from Councillor Martins asking how risks in this area were identified, the Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head informed the scrutiny committee that this was the role of the Community Safety Partnership. The strategic assessment was built on intelligence about risks in the community. If a particular safeguarding risk was identified, the partnership would work together to consider the risks.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan about procedure for councillors with concerns, the Culture and Play Section Head suggested that councillors should contact either him, as lead officer, or one of his team identified in the policy and procedures. Dependent on the concern a referral could be made to the county council to consider the matter further.

The Chair thanked the officers for the presentation.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

66

Presentation: Watford Borough Council - Establishing a Joint Venture and a Trading Company

The scrutiny committee received a copy of the presentation given by the Head of Community and Customer Services. He explained about the new joint housing venture with Watford Community Housing Trust and the new companies, Watford Commercial Services Ltd, Hart Homes (Watford) Ltd and Sale LLP. He informed members about the structure of each of the companies and the council's relationship with each of them. He added that the Deputy Managing Director, Nick Fenwick, had replaced him as a director and board member for Sale LLP and was an additional director for Watford Commercial Services Ltd.

Following several questions from Councillor Martins, the Head of Community and Customer Services informed members that should there be a deadlock when making a decision, the articles of association would cover this matter. He would ask the Head of Democracy and Governance to confirm this and the extent of the council's liabilities with Sale LLP. The business plans for each of the three businesses had been approved by Cabinet in November. Each development scheme would need to stand on its own merits. Any profits generated from a

scheme would help fund affordable homes elsewhere. The main aim of the venture was to ensure the introduction of new affordable homes in the Watford area.

Councillor Johnson, the portfolio holder responsible for housing and property, added that it would be necessary to have some property available at market level to enable affordable housing. The town needed more affordable housing. There was a political accountability. Decisions would be reported to the council's Property Investment Board.

Councillor Khan commented that there needed to be a democratic oversight. He noted the comment about the Property Investment Board.

Councillor Johnson added that information would also be presented to the Major Projects Board.

Councillor Khan continued that scrutiny was important and there needed to be members' input. He said that Budget Panel was available to look at the financial aspects of schemes. He asked whether 'Right to Buy' was applicable to the homes developed through this venture.

The Head of Community and Customer Services advised that properties would be developed within the borough and outside, as close to the borough as possible. It would be necessary to consider the accessibility of developments outside the borough. Each project had to be presented to the Property Investment Board. The two organisations did not want to limit themselves to only developing properties within the borough. In response to the comments about 'Right to Buy', he explained that under the current legislation this would not be applicable to properties owned through Hart Homes Ltd.

Following a question about the risks to the council and trust, the Head of Community and Customer Services stated that each had a 50/50 stake. For example, if the trust provided the land, then the council would provide the equivalent financial stake. Any profits from developments may be added to capital or revenue accounts; it would depend on which company had generated the profit. In response to a question about his role as a director, the Head of Community and Customer Services explained that he had been appointed by the council to Hart Homes Ltd and Watford Commercial Services Ltd. The council could nominate someone else to replace him at any point.

Councillor Johnson responded to Councillor Rindl's question about potential losses and the viability of schemes. He stated that he would prefer that development schemes contained 100% of affordable accommodation. However, it was necessary to ensure that schemes were financially stable. He hoped that

schemes would generate more than 35% affordable accommodation, as this should be the baseline. The venture would need to do all it could to provide more affordable homes.

The Head of Community and Customer Services confirmed that the company would always aim for more than 35%. Information about winding up the company would be included in the articles of association. He was unsure whether there was any risk to the local council taxpayers, however if there were any problems there could be a reputational risk for the council. He advised that officers had taken time to ensure the business plans were robust.

Councillor Khan repeated that it was important that councillors had a role in seeing what was happening.

Councillor Johnson stated he was passionate about housing and encouraged councillors to get involved where possible. He suggested they could attend the Housing Policy Advisory Group and get involved in the process.

It was agreed that the Head of Democracy and Governance would be contacted about the articles of association and asked for information about the council's liability.

RESOLVED –

that the presentation be noted.

67 Executive Decision Progress Report

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report for 2016/17.

RESOLVED –

that the updated report be noted.

68 Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Hastrick informed the scrutiny committee that the county's Health Scrutiny Committee had met earlier that day and updated councillors on the main topic under discussion.

Neighbourhood Forum Task Group - Cabinet response

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer including the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 5 December 2016, when the Neighbourhood Forum Task Group's recommendations had been considered.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reported that Cabinet had reviewed the task group's recommendations. The Mayor had decided to create a small working group to further review the recommendations. The group would comprise, the Mayor, Councillor Collett, portfolio holder for communities, Councillor Cavinder, Chair of the task group and the Head of Democracy and Governance. The meeting was due to take place on Monday 23 January.

Following a question about the make-up of the working group and lack of an opposition councillor, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that Neighbourhood Forums were an executive function and Cabinet had approved the Mayor's suggestion about the working group. Further information would be fed back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee once more details had been received. Councillor Bell, group leader of the Labour group had been present at Cabinet. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer agreed to contact the Head of Democracy and Governance about the make-up of the working group.

RESOLVED –

that an update be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2017.

Budget Panel

The Chair of Budget Panel, Councillor Khan, referred the scrutiny committee to the minutes which were available on the council's website.

Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel

The Chair of Outsourced Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Williams, advised that the scrutiny panel had met on two occasions since this scrutiny committee's last meeting. The minutes of the first meeting were available on the council's website. The latest meeting took place on Tuesday. The scrutiny panel had received a report on the current ICT arrangements and how they were bedding in. The panel had also received the Parking Service annual report.

Community Safety Partnership Task Group

The Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, Councillor Martins, informed the scrutiny committee that the task group had held its first meeting on 20 October 2016. Since that meeting he had met with the relevant officers to discuss how this task group could move forward. He felt it was important to see how all partners within the Community Safety Partnership worked, not just the Police. A meeting was being arranged for councillors to learn about best practice in this area of scrutiny. In addition following a discussion it had been agreed that three meetings would be scheduled for 2017/18 rather than just two, as in the current municipal year.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head added that the Community Safety Partnership was driven by the strategic assessment. This showed the risks to the community and set out the priorities for the partnership, which were then developed into an action plan. The aim of the task group would be to scrutinise a specific priority rather than individual organisations. This method would enable the task group to invite the relevant partners for a priority to its meeting.

73

Dates of Next Meetings

- Thursday 23 February 2017 (for call-in only)
- Thursday 23 March 2017

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the meeting scheduled for 2 February 2017 would be cancelled as there had been no key decisions discussed at Cabinet that could be called in for review.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.35 pm