

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 September 2017

Present: Councillor K Hastrick (Chair)
Councillor Ahsan Khan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors J Dhindsa (for minute numbers 32 to 38), A Dychton,
A Grimston, Asif Khan, R Martins, D Walford and T Williams

Also present: Councillor Karen Collett
Councillor Nigel Bell (for minute number 36)
Councillor Peter Jeffree (for minute numbers 32 to 42)
Vanessa Levy, West Watford Community Association, Centre
Coordinator (for minute numbers 32 to 36)
Maureen Miller, West Watford Community Association, Chair
of Trustees, (for minute numbers 32 to 36)

Officers: Deputy Managing Director and Director of Place Shaping and
Corporate Performance
Transport and Infrastructure Section Head
Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head
Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Contract Monitoring Officer
Commissioning Officer
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

32 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no disclosures of interests.

34 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2017 were submitted and signed.

35 **Call-in**

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

36 **Commissioning Framework Community Centres - West Watford Community Association**

The Chair advised that she had decided to move this item forward on the agenda to allow the external guests to leave after their item if they wished.

The Leisure and Community Section Head informed the scrutiny committee that West Watford Community Association received £11,000 in kind; this covered the rent to the council for the hire of the premises. In addition they received £23,000 as part of the Commissioning Framework.

The Leisure and Community Section Head advised that the framework was half way through its three-year cycle. In November the scrutiny committee would receive the end of Year 1 report.

West Watford Community Association

The Chair welcomed Vanessa Levy and Maureen Miller to the meeting.

The representatives gave a presentation about West Watford Community Association. Maureen Miller, the Chair of the Trustees, informed the councillors that the association had been serving the community since 1973. It was located on the corner of Harwoods Road and Holywell Road. It aimed to be accessible to all sections of the local community. Three staff were employed, which included Vanessa Levy, the Centre Co-ordinator. She advised that the association 'grew' its own staff. The two Centre Development Workers had previously been volunteers at the centre. They had a large group of volunteers.

Maureen Miller advised that the association had a Business Plan, which was regularly reviewed and updated. The association had recently signed a new 59-year lease with the council. The premises had limitations but the staff and volunteers sought ways to overcome them.

Vanessa Levy agreed that the size of the premises was one of the association's biggest problems. She explained that the yoga class had to be limited to a maximum of eight participants due to the size of the room. However being small meant that anyone coming in was not ignored.

Maureen Miller advised that staff and trustees listened to its users and ensured it had the activities they wanted. She said that Vanessa worked very hard and was there much longer than the 32 hours she was required to work. The income the association received provided the services available to the community. The accounts showed a reserve held sufficient to cover a year's wages. Everyone was grateful for the grant received from the council.

Vanessa Levy added that the association had a total budget of £60,000. It valued and needed the support from the council.

Maureen Miller explained that the centre had decided to review its carbon footprint and recognised that it needed to recycle. This had cost implications for the association; following negotiations with the recycling company they had agreed to a more reasonable collection time period. The trustees and staff were very mindful of how the money was spent.

Vanessa Levy highlighted some of the activities which took place at the centre. There was a busy timetable which was delivered directly by the association. It recruited tutors and many activities were provided by volunteers. There was a newsletter, 'West Watch', produced twice a year and circulated to every house in West Watford. It highlighted the activities which took place throughout the week. The association aimed to build a strong community where people looked out for each other and helped them when possible. It helped to break down barriers. She informed the scrutiny committee about 'Westie LETS' which was a local exchange and transfer scheme. There were between 50 and 60 active members. She outlined some of the ways they had helped people in the community. The association also had a community allotment. She advised that where there were any gaps in the timetable those times were used by other groups and organisations, for example West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust used the venue for some staff training sessions. These lets brought an income to the association.

The representatives circulated a copy of 'West Watch', the 2016-2017 annual review and a breakdown of the ethnic mix of users at the centre. It was noted that the centre did not ask external organisers for a breakdown of ethnic data.

Councillor Bell said that he had wished to attend the scrutiny committee to support Maureen Miller and Vanessa Levy. He was not aware of any other organisation like it in West Watford. Due to its location it could be used as a drop in centre. The Police and PCSOs held surgeries there. He mentioned the food evening they regularly held and the range of food people provided.

Councillor Dhindsa said that as the ward councillor, where the centre was located, he echoed Councillor Bell's comments. The trustees committed a lot of

their time to the centre. He felt they did excellent work for the money they received.

The scrutiny committee commented that they were pleased to hear about the association and the work it did. Councillors asked the representatives about any issues they had and any threats they envisaged that would affect the association.

Vanessa Levy said that the association had amazing volunteers, but they needed to be supported. One of the Centre Development Workers had revised the volunteer policy. Many of the activities were run by volunteers or trustees. The officers regularly negotiated contracts in order to bring down prices.

Maureen Miller added that fly tipping was a major issue in the area. Residents regularly came in to report incidents in the area, included outside the centre.

Vanessa Levy advised that due to the rent levels, people did not have enough money and felt trapped. They did not have security of tenure. There was a high turnover within the community. This could be a benefit as new people came to the centre. If staff were made aware of an issue they would refer the person to the relevant organisation. The coffee morning was held on a Monday and this day had been specifically chosen. It enabled people to drop into the centre and speak to someone. Whenever possible the Police and PCSOs also attended. Councillor Mills visited and she was able to speak to people about issues they wanted to raise with her.

Maureen Miller stated that the association had robust policies in place on safeguarding in respect of vulnerable adults and children. She said that the biggest threat to the association would be the loss of funding from the council. They were able to bring in small amounts from other places, for example the Small Grants Fund and the local Tesco was very supportive. Some people provided services 'in kind'. However the removal of £23,000 out of the total £60,000 budget would be a big loss. It was much harder to get core funding.

Following a question about printing costs for their publications, Vanessa Levy explained that the annual review was published in-house. However 'West Watch' was printed externally. One of the trustees, a former councillor, managed to get it printed at a reasonable cost. However it was felt the cost of publishing 'West Watch' was worth it.

Maureen Miller said that anyone was welcome to visit the centre and see what they did.

The Chair thanked the representatives for attending the meeting, giving their presentation and responding to councillors' questions.

Review update: Parking Strategy (Year 1 recommendations) Task Group

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head drew the scrutiny committee's attention to the briefing paper he had circulated prior to the meeting. The paper outlined the background to the Public Realm enhancement scheme and its relationship to the original Task Group recommendations. Four of the original recommendations had been incorporated into the enhancement scheme; others would be taken forward separately and three schemes could not be taken forward for various reasons.

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head informed the scrutiny committee that as part of the enhancement scheme a new taxi rank would be created in Wellstones. It would utilise electronic sensors indicating to users in the High Street that vehicles were available for hire. There would be improved lighting and CCTV for the passage from the High Street to Wellstones. There would also be improved opportunities for taxis in Church Street. The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head circulated some of the proposed plans for the scheme.

The scrutiny committee discussed the officer's presentation. Some councillors were concerned that the new taxi rank in Wellstones would be located away from potential customers. They felt the taxis needed to be located on the High Street.

In response to a question about the number of ranks in the borough, the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head advised that this was a licensing matter and he would ask the licensing team to provide councillors with that information. He stated that as part of the new Intu development, a taxi 'call-in' service would be provided. This would enable taxi drivers to drive in to Intu and pick up their fare. As long as they had left within 10 minutes there would be no charge.

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head informed the scrutiny committee that following the completion of the Intu development it was expected there would be an increase in footfall in the High Street. The aim of the enhancement scheme was to eliminate some of the vehicles. Currently there were over 1,000 vehicle movements a day between Clarendon Road and Market Street. It was proposed to reduce this to 250 a day. Some buses would be re-routed to avoid the High Street. The road between Clarendon Road and Market Street would be narrowed; pavements would be widened and rising bollards would be installed at the entrance to the High Street. The High Street would become the largest on-street shopping centre in the country. The aim was to make it family friendly. The number of taxi rank spaces had doubled from the original task group

recommendations. The proposals had been discussed with the county council who was happy with the scheme. He advised councillors that none of the original task group recommendations added taxi rank spaces on the High Street.

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head reported that a consultation about the proposed enhancement scheme had been carried out. The results were being compiled by the consultant. The scheme had been agreed in principle by Cabinet. The enhancement scheme would remove the four spaces from outside Barclays Bank. These were the only spaces to be adversely affected. There would be an increase in provision including in King Street by the Met Quarter.

In response to comments about a petition by taxi drivers, the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head assured councillors that even though the consultation closed at the end of August, if a petition was received it would still be considered.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded the scrutiny committee that reason for the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head attending the meeting was to explain why the task group's recommendations had not been implemented. It was not to review the Public Realm enhancement scheme.

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head added that the enhancement scheme had also been discussed at the Highways Liaison meeting. He explained the process for developing the scheme from concept designs, through consultation, evaluation of responses and then the final design decision would be made.

Following a suggestion proposing four taxi spaces outside Moon Under Water on the High Street, the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head advised that safety issues would need to be considered and the county council would need to review the scheme's design.

The Chair proposed that the update be noted and further action be taken where necessary.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted and further action be taken where necessary.

Small Grants Fund Review 2016-2017

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Leisure and Community Section Head which included the annual review of the Small Grants Fund for 2016-2017.

The Commissioning Officer informed councillors that in paragraph 3.3 of the report, the survey conducted in 2016/17 was for the period 2015/16 and the survey carried out in 2017/18 was regarding the 2016/17 financial year. She advised that in response to suggestions about an online form, officers were in the process of testing a new online application form. The team had worked with Watford and Three Rivers Trust who supported the non-constituted groups. She stated that questions would be added to the application form requesting equalities information.

It was noted that a number of applications from 2016/17 had been deferred to 2017/18, due to the budget being spent. Some councillors expressed their concern that the budget would run out early. They questioned whether the scrutiny committee could recommend that the small grants budget should be increased. It was suggested that the funding could be taken from the council's reserves.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the budget holder was responsible for their budget. As part of the budget process they needed to consider where they could make savings and if they needed to ask for an increase in budgets, known as growth bids. The growth bids were considered by the Head of Service, Leadership Team, Portfolio Holders, then Cabinet and Council would make the final decision.

The Leisure and Community Section Head advised that he would discuss the matter with his Head of Service and Portfolio Holder.

The vice-chair suggested that officers may wish to consider reducing the maximum amount that could be applied for by organisations.

It was noted that Budget Panel had the ability to consider the council's proposed budget and could make recommendations to Cabinet.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

End of Quarter 1 (2017/18) Performance report

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications setting out the end of Quarter 1 results for the council's key performance indicators.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications advised that the general election in June had made an impact on the Customer Service Centre's service levels. She explained that the service had not provided any responses to indicators 6 and 7. The team was hoping to procure a new software system, which would be a major part of the Watford 2020 programme and would provide more timely and consistent information for reporting.

Following a question about indicator 8, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications informed the scrutiny committee that Heads of Service had been charged with making sure that complaints were responded to promptly.

In response to a question about the cost of bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households, the Deputy Managing Director advised that officers were very aware of costs. They negotiated with owners and providers of temporary accommodation. The Housing Policy Advisory Group had been provided with a breakdown of the types of properties used to accommodate homeless households. The team had worked hard to reduce costs. The intent was to make more temporary accommodation available. Officers tried to ensure that households were kept as local to Watford as possible. At least one officer was regularly looking at increasing the accommodation.

RESOLVED –

that the key performance indicator results for Quarter 1 2017/18 be noted.

Executive Decision Progress Report

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report for 2017/18. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer provided an update as the Cabinet meeting due to be held in October had been cancelled. This meant that the report about Cassiobury Park car park would be presented in November for consideration.

RESOLVED –

that the updated report be noted.

41 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Hastrick provided an update on the county council's Health Scrutiny Committee. She gave an update on the situation with Nascot Lawn.

42 **Scrutiny proposal - Tall buildings and Watford Borough Council's emergency plans**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer which included the scrutiny proposal form completed by Councillor Jeffree and also discussed with Councillor Bell.

The Chair invited Councillor Jeffree to speak about the proposed scrutiny.

Councillor Jeffree informed the scrutiny committee that currently there were two ongoing inquiries. The Grenfell Inquiry was due to provide an interim report next Easter and the review of Building Regulations was due to report in the Spring. He suggested that it may be too early to start the proposed scrutiny task group during the current municipal year.

Following a question about the possibility of carrying out part of the review immediately, Councillor Jeffree felt that this may not be necessary. Councillors had been provided with information about the council's emergency plan procedures and how it worked closely with the county council. He suggested that councillors could be given a presentation by the Facilities and Resilience Manager and the Facilities Management Buildings and Projects Section Head. He hoped this would give councillors the confidence in the council's plans.

It was suggested that if the presentation was to take place, the scrutiny committee could then make an informed decision as to whether the task group needed to go ahead to review that aspect of the proposal. The presentation should be open to all councillors and not just those on Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair proposed that a councillors' briefing be arranged to enable them to hear about the council's emergency planning arrangements. Following the presentation an item would be added to the next agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider whether a task group needed to be set up to review this specific area.

RESOLVED –

1. that an all-councillors' briefing session be arranged to hear about the council's emergency planning arrangements.
2. that following the presentation an item be included on the next agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the presentation and to consider whether a task group needs to be set up.

43 **Budget Panel**

Councillor Asif Khan, chair of Budget Panel, advised that the panel had met on 13 September 2017. Councillors had reviewed the Quarter 1 Finance Digest and were informed about the budget setting process.

44 **Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel**

Councillor Williams, chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, informed the scrutiny committee that the panel had met on 25 September 2017. The meeting had been held at Watford Leisure Centre Woodside. SLM representatives had presented their annual report. The panel had also reviewed the Quarter 1 Performance report.

45 **Community Safety Partnership Task Group**

Councillor Grimston, chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, advised that the task group had met on 27 July and 4 September 2017. She outlined the proposed programme for the next meeting.

46 **Tackling Loneliness Task Group**

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer stated that the task group had met on 22 September. Councillor Mauthoor had been elected as chair. The task group had been given several documents to review and links to radio programmes about tackling loneliness had been circulated. Councillors Mauthoor and Cavinder would be attending a seminar organised by the Public Policy Exchange about the subject. The task group was likely to be holding an all-day session to hear from relevant groups and organisations. The task group had been informed that it would need to provide its final report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in

January 2018, prior to any recommendations being considered by the Executive in February.

47 Work Programme

The scrutiny committee received the draft work programme for 2017/18. It had been updated following the last meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the work programme be noted.

48 Dates of Next Meetings

- Thursday 26 October 2017 (for call-in only)
- Thursday 23 November 2017
- Wednesday 20 December 2017 (for call-in only)

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.20 pm