

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 JULY 2013

Present: Councillor K Collett (Chair)
Councillor A Khan (Vice-Chair)
Councillors J Aron, S Greenslade, K Hastrick, S Johnson,
A Joynes and A Lovejoy

Officers: Commissioning Manager
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Joynes replaced Councillor Bell.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Martins.

17 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

Councillor Hastrick informed the Scrutiny Committee that with reference to minute number 20 she was on the Board of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), which was referred to in the report.

18 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2013 were submitted and signed.

Following the recent press release about the new car parking charges at Watford General the Chair suggested that, she wrote to the Director of Strategy and Infrastructure, on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee, expressing Members disappointment at the overall increase in parking charges. She agreed that she would circulate the draft letter to the Scrutiny Committee prior to sending it to the Director.

RESOLVED –

that the Chair writes to West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust expressing the Scrutiny Committee's disappointment with the new car parking pricing structure.

19 **CALL-IN**

No Executive decisions had been called in.

20 **UPDATE: REVIEW OF THREE YEAR GRANT FUNDING PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny Committee received an update from the Commissioning Manager on the long term impact on the four organisations which had received the largest cuts to their grants from April 2012. The update had been requested at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 December 2011, when Members had reviewed the called in decision “Review of three year grant funding programme to achieve savings”, which had originally been agreed by Cabinet.

Watford Muslim Community Project

The Commissioning Manager informed the Scrutiny Committee that officers had met with trustees from the Watford Muslim Community Project on 15 July. The trustees had prepared a list of actions to be completed before handing the keys back to the council. The final handover was scheduled for 2 August and officers were continuing to work with the Project’s representatives.

The Commissioning Manger provided a brief summary of the outreach service the Council had commissioned from the Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB) in the event that the Muslim Community Project ceased providing services.. The commissioned service was for a period of one year. During the period the CAB had provided the outreach service the Council had only received one complaint, which had been at the start of the project. There had been no further complaints received and the Council’s officers and the CAB were not aware of any negative impact expressed due to the closure of the Project. Officers had asked the CAB to review the outreach service as part of their overall service provision and in doing so ensure that they engaged with the key stakeholders in West Watford.

The Vice-Chair commented that he was aware that the Vicarage Ward Councillors’ casework had increased since the closure of the Watford Muslim Community Project. The casework included visa enquiries and translation. He added that he had also had people from West Watford contacting him. Previously these residents would have approached the Project.

The Commissioning Manager said that it was helpful to be made aware of this information. The CAB was required to provide an outreach service to all users in West Watford. Officers were not aware of any negative impact expressed due to the closure of the Watford Muslim Community Project. The Commissioning Manager believed that part of the organisation’s services had not been funded by the Council, for example visa and translation services. The Council’s officers had ensured that the CAB had the relevant expertise to be able to provide the required advice.

Following further questions from the Scrutiny Committee, the Commissioning Manager advised that the outreach project had come to the end of the

agreement. The CAB had been granted funding to provide a time limited outreach project. The advisor had been based at Westfield Children's Centre for three days each week. The CAB had chosen this venue as being culturally sensitive as it was understood to be used by all parts of the community. The CAB had also tried to secure another site at a GP surgery, but this had not happened for a number of reasons. The Commissioning Manager also said that she understood that there had been little uptake of this service. She reiterated that Council officers had asked the CAB to evaluate the outreach project. It was essential that if a further outreach programme was set up that the organisation and the Council learnt from this experience.

In response to questions about providing a culturally sensitive service, the Commissioning Manager mentioned that the CAB had recruited an advisor who had the appropriate language provision. They had started in September 2012, but then left in January 2013. The CAB had then had difficulty in recruiting to that post. However, the CAB ensured that the service continued and allocated one of its trained advisers to carry out the work. The adviser had access to a translation service as required. Reasons the CAB may have had difficulties in recruiting to the role were that the person had to be CAB qualified and that the project was for a limited time period finishing at the end of June 2013. Following a question from the Chair, the Commissioning Manager advised that she would need to check if the CAB carried out exit interviews with people leaving the organisation.

In response to questions from the Vice-Chair, the Commissioning Manager reiterated that the outreach service had been put in place to mitigate the closure of the Muslim Community Project but was a service for all users of West Watford. There appeared to have been a low take up even though the scheme had been marketed. The CAB needed to review the reasons for this.

The Commissioning Manager added that the Council had not been aware of the exact date the Watford Muslim Community Project intended to close. The CAB had set up the project in July 2012 in preparation for any anticipated closure. It would have been too late to have left the preparations until the Project actually closed. The main impact on the Muslim community would have been after March 2013 when the Project finally closed. The CAB's outreach project finished in June 2013.

The Vice-Chair noted that since the end of June there had been no service in West Watford. He felt that the original objective had not been met as the organisations ran simultaneously for much of the year.

Members asked for the CAB's report to be shared with the Scrutiny Committee, including, if possible, the reasons the person left the project.

It was agreed that a further update would be presented to the November meeting.

Watford Women's Centre

The update included information about the impact of the funding reduction on the Watford Women's Centre. The Commissioning Manager confirmed that the organisation had been gifted new premises. It was noted that Watford Women's Centre was the commissioned organisation to provide a domestic violence abuse service for 12 months. It provided quarterly monitoring reports as part of its current Service Level Agreement.

Multi Cultural Community Centre

The update included information about this organisation. Members were informed that the premises had been improved. A strategic plan had been produced, which included actions to be undertaken.

Watford African Caribbean Association

The Commissioning Manager informed the Scrutiny Committee that during the transition period the organisation had made some people redundant, but it had also recruited staff to new posts. Some of the Association's proposed progress, for example the community café, had not happened due to staffing changes.

Following a question about unspent funds, the Commissioning Manager confirmed that the Council would be clawing back any unspent funds that had not been used for the pilot project of setting up a community café. The remaining transitional money was being used to fund the services of a consultant to help the organisation conduct a needs analysis.

RESOLVED –

that the update on the long term impact on the four organisations be noted.

21

PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE: VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK

The Scrutiny Committee received the review update on the progress of the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework and Small Grants Fund.

The Vice-Chair commented that the Small Grants Fund needed more publicity. He suggested that venues where small groups could hire the premises needed to be provided with publicity material, for example church halls.

The Commissioning Manager advised that she would ensure that this was done. She would also provide Members with additional posters.

The Scrutiny Committee requested that the uptake of the Small Grants Fund be reviewed in on year.

RESOLVED –

1. that the update be noted.
2. that a review of the Small grants Fund be carried out in one year.

22 **TASK GROUPS**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer setting out suggested proposals for the election of Task Group Chairs.

Following Members' concerns about Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointing the Task Group Chair, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer suggested that another option might be to invite the proposer of the scrutiny suggestion to early meetings with officers or external organisations in order to discuss the topic and possible supporting information. In this format the Chair would still be appointed at the first Task Group meeting.

Members preferred this alternative proposal and agreed that officers proceed in this manner with all new Task Groups.

The Scrutiny Committee also reviewed the suggested guidance for Task Groups. They welcomed the guidance and asked that a similar guidance or letter be prepared for witnesses attending Task Groups and other scrutiny meetings.

RESOLVED –

1. that the person proposing the agreed scrutiny topic be invited to initial meetings with officers or external organisations.
2. that the guidance for Task Group members be noted.
3. that guidance for scrutiny witnesses be drafted and presented to a future meeting.

23 **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Thursday 26 September 2013
- Thursday 24 October 2013 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 28 November 2013

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.25 pm