

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 SEPTEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor K Collett (Chair)  
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Aron, N Bell, A Joynes, R Martins, K McLeod,  
P Taylor and D Walford

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head  
Commissioning Manager  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

### 14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor McLeod replaced Councillor Hastrick and Councillor Taylor replaced Councillor Greenslade.

### 15 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 16 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2014 were submitted and signed.

### 17 CALL-IN

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

### 18 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Scrutiny Committee received updates on questions and actions raised at previous meetings.

#### PI39 – CCS12 and CCS13 Complaints resolved

The Scrutiny Committee discussed the delay in the requested information being provided. It was noted that the delays were due to problems with accessing the software which held the information. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head suggested that it would be more relevant to provide Members with the information on the most recent quarter recorded.

#### PI42 – Number of people sleeping rough

The Scrutiny Committee noted the answer provided by the Housing Section Head. Councillor Martins commented that the future provision of funding or the lack of it would have implications for the Council on the delivery of its plans. He requested that Members should be provided with the following information –

- What are the Council's plans?
- What is street outreach?
- What provisions are provided for homeless people?

#### PI43 – CCS7 HomeLet – survey response

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer stated that since the publication of the report, the Housing Supply Manager had provided information about the survey. Officers had advised that they had been disappointed with the number of responses to the survey. Three letting agents had responded with only two completing most of the questions. 15 landlords had responded, but only three had completed most of the questions. 14 tenants had completed the survey. Due to the low response rate, officers were unable to draw any conclusions. Although overall, the responses had been positive about the service received from HomeLet.

Councillor Dhindsa noted the low response rate and asked whether any lessons could be learnt from the exercise.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head said that officers had envisaged that it might be difficult to obtain views as it was often difficult engaging with tenants. Officers were considering using more focus groups to discuss the scheme and discover people's views. The survey had been straightforward and the online link to the survey on Survey Monkey had been sent directly to individual's email addresses. Incentives had been given to encourage people to complete the survey.

The Chair informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had spoken to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Johnson, about HomeLet. He had said that he would be happy to attend the Scrutiny Committee to discuss the scheme. The Chair felt that one issue was how to attract private landlords to get involved in the scheme. She suggested that Members may wish to put forward any ideas they might have in order to attract landlords. She was aware that some authorities provided cash incentives to landlords, but this was not financially feasible for Watford.

#### PI44 – DG1 Voter Registration

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee about the recent election canvass that had taken place during July and August. She explained that the majority of voters had received a confirmation letter; other voters had been asked to provide further information to ensure they completed

the Individual Electoral Registration process, which they had been able to do online or on a form included with their letter. All letters had contained contact details for the Electoral Services Team. She added that she was aware the office had received a number of calls from individuals seeking further information.

Councillor Taylor advised that he had moved during the summer and had used the new registration system. It had appeared to him that it was assumed people would register online.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer said that if residents had any difficulties registering online they should contact the Electoral Services Team who would provide help.

The Chair suggested that Councillors should receive an update on the registration process. She asked that the update should include information about whether there were many calls from elderly residents. Also the update should include information about difficulties accessing the online registration process and if officers were aware of any language difficulties experienced. The Scrutiny Committee also requested that regular updates about Individual Electoral Registration should be included in the Members' Bulletin.

#### PI45 – HR1 Sickness absence – Shadowing CSC officers

The Chair informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had arranged to visit the Customer Service Centre (CSC) in October and urged Members to take up the opportunity to see the service in action.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that a review of CSC arrangements was planned. The Head of Community and Customer Services was the Project Sponsor and the Customer Services Section Head was likely to be the Project Manager. Members were encouraged to provide any views about the CSC to the Customer Services Section Head. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer stated that she would find out how long the review was due to take place.

#### RESOLVED –

1. that the Partnerships and Performance Section Head and Committee and Scrutiny Officer ensure that the information requested by the Scrutiny Committee be provided.
2. that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and relevant officers be invited to a future meeting in order to discuss HomeLet with the Scrutiny Committee.
3. that the updates be noted.

## **PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE: SMALL GRANTS FUND - A REVIEW OF THE FUND FOR THE PERIOD MAY 2013 - MARCH 2014**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Commissioning Manager for Leisure and Community, which provided a summary of the Small Grants Fund for the period from May 2013 to March 2014.

The Commissioning Manager stated that the scheme had been very successful in its first year. It had benefited from better publicity. She thanked the original Task Group which had provided input to officers on the development of the new scheme.

The Chair also thanked the task Group for their work. She had noted that the scheme had been widely advertised and that local groups had received information.

The Commissioning Manager confirmed that no funds had been carried forward to the 2014/15 budget. In response to a question about the rejected applications, she explained that there had been a variety of reasons proposals were refused. The main reason had been that organisations had requested core funding. Capital building works' funding and sports equipment had also been refused as they did not meet the criteria. She stressed that sports clubs were not excluded from applying for funding as could be seen in the list of organisations granted funding during 2013/14.

Councillor McLeod commented that she was impressed by the variety of groups that had been awarded funding and the different locations across the town. She asked how the fund had been advertised. She suggested that further publicity could be included in watford-wide publications, for example About Watford. She also asked whether the fund was advertised on the website, including information about the results of applications.

The Commissioning Manager responded that as part of the publicity for the fund, officers had worked with the Communications Team to ensure it was included in the Council's publications. The Team also wanted to ensure that people were aware of the success stories. She would advise Members if the fund was advertised on the Council's website.

Following requests for further information on specific awards, the Commissioning Manager advised that she would provide the information following the meeting as she did not have the individual case details immediately available.

The Commissioning Manager explained about the application process. She advised that the fund was open throughout the year, but a closing date was set to ensure that the application could be processed within that financial year. A decision-maker's meeting was held every month. Officers assessed the initial applications and then presented them to the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services and Portfolio Holder for a final decision. She added that officers recommended to groups that they should apply well in advance of any funding requirements.

Councillor Taylor noted that in one case a request had only been part-funded based on the percentage of people from Watford. He asked whether a similar scheme was available to groups in Hertsmere Borough Council.

The Commissioning Manager informed the Scrutiny Committee that officers directed groups to other relevant organisations, particularly Watford and Three Rivers Trust, which had information about different funding streams.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head suggested that an article might be included in About Watford; it could advertise the scheme and highlight some of those who had previously been successful.

The Chair asked whether officers received any feedback from groups, particularly letters of thanks.

The Commissioning Manager responded that officers regularly received complimentary letters. All groups were asked to complete a monitoring report. This enabled officers to see the benefit of the award and the reports often included thanks for the support given to the groups. She agreed that she would provide an article for the Members' Bulletin and would include some of the comments that officers received.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Commissioning Manager provides the information as requested by the Scrutiny Committee.
2. that the Scrutiny Committee's comments be noted.
3. that an article be produced for the Members' Bulletin.

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#### **UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MEASURES (IN-HOUSE SERVICES) - QUARTER 1: (APRIL - JUNE) 2014/15**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head, which provided an update on the Council's performance indicators and measures for in-house services for the first quarter of 2014/15.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head stated that many of the indicators were now being presented to the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. She suggested that as part of this Scrutiny Committee's work, it might wish to review the projects and areas of work contained in the Council's Corporate Plan. The Plan was part of the performance framework. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that many of the indicators included within the report related to housing matters. She highlighted some of the key indicators for the quarter.

Following a question from Councillor Bell about the temporary accommodation indicator, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that the indicator was a snapshot of the situation at a specific time. It was acknowledged that the indicator for quarter 2 may be higher, but until the analysis had been completed she was unable to provide specific information.

#### CS7 – Number of households who considered themselves as homeless

Councillor Martins noted the positive response for this indicator. It showed that the Council was dealing with those people who approached the service. However, the number of people the service had to support was not good.

#### CS13 Complaints resolved at stage 1 and CS14 % of stage 1 complaints resolved within 10 days

Councillor Martins said that he was concerned about the poor results for these indicators. Those people who complained and did not get a response in the prescribed time could damage the reputation of the Council.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the services shown to have not resolved complaints in time were those service areas that had pressures from customers. It often related to where the service was placing its priorities at the time. For example for Revenues and Benefits the priority would be to ensure that applications were completed and the cheques were issued on time. She hoped that the quarter 2 results would show an improvement.

The Chair stated that she felt the Scrutiny Committee should consider reviewing relevant parts of the Corporate Plan at future meetings.

RESOLVED –

1. that future reports include a review of the Council's Corporate Plan.
2. that the Scrutiny Committee's comments be noted.

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## **EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT**

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report 2014/15.

The Chair referred to the Executive decision which had agreed amendments to the Council's Housing Nomination Policy based on Armed Forces related regulations. She was aware of an instance when an enquiry had been made at the CSC and the officer had been unable to provide any information.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer agreed to circulate the original report and decision to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Dhindsa noted the decision to award a 4-year hawk flying contract. He asked how the success of the scheme would be monitored and how much the scheme had cost. It was agreed that this information would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Dhindsa referred to the Big Events programme. He asked how officers measured complaints about events. He stressed that he considered the events programme to be a good initiative.

Councillor Martins, who was a Central Ward Councillor, commented that the most recent event was a success for one sector of the community. The noise levels had been excessive according to the complaints he had received from residents. He asked that in future officers monitored noise levels. He understood that noise limiters had not been put in place. He suggested that residents should be surveyed about the Big Events programme.

Councillor McLeod noted that there several decisions in the list that could have a cumulative effect on Watford as a whole. She asked whether this was monitored by officers. She also commented on piecemeal development which it was noted was due to be reviewed by the Scrutiny Committee in November.

Councillor Joynes stated that she was a member of the Joint Housing and Planning Policy Advisory Group. The Housing Section Head had circulated questions about housing policy and she urged all Members to complete the questionnaire.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Scrutiny Committee be provided with the requested information.
2. that the report be noted.

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## **HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Councillor Aron reported that she had attended the welcome meeting and would be attending the first formal scrutiny committee in October. She regularly received emails related to health matters across the county. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer forwarded any emails related to Watford health matters to all Watford Councillors.

Councillor Bell stated that there would be an all day scrutiny of Watford Hospital in November. It was due to be held at the hospital.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

23 **BUDGET PANEL**

The Chair requested that the Chair of Budget Panel be asked to provide a written update as he was not present at the meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the Chair of Budget Panel be asked to provide a written update to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

24 **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

Councillor Taylor, Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, informed the Scrutiny Committee of the work carried out by the Panel in July. He highlighted some of the work that would be carried out during the year.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

25 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

Councillor McLeod, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, reported on the work carried out by the Task Group in July. She said that the Task Group would be covering some interesting topics this year and had agreed to set up some all-member briefings.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

26 **PROPERTY TASK GROUP UPDATE**

Councillor Bell, the Chair of the Property Task Group, informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Task Group had met in July. The Task Group had reviewed the interim report and provided its views to officers. A further meeting would be arranged to consider the final report before it was presented to Cabinet.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

27 **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Thursday 30 October 2014 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 20 November 2014



- Thursday 18 December 2014 (For call-in only)

The Chair reminded the Scrutiny Committee that the Housing Trust would be attending the meeting on 20 November 2014, for a further update on the Task Group's recommendations. She asked Members to ensure that they had considered the recommendations and were prepared with questions for the Chief Executive. It was agreed that the Committee and Scrutiny Officer would circulate the original recommendations and the updates provided by Watford Community Housing Trust to the Scrutiny Committee.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.30 pm