



PROPERTY SCRUTINY TASK GROUP

Tuesday, 21st January, 2014

6.00 pm

Town Hall, Watford

Publication date: 13 January 2014

AGENDA

Committee Membership: Councillors K Hastrick, S Johnson, A Khan, M Meerabux and S Rackett

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR / COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Task Group is asked to elect a Chair for the Task Group.

2. DISCLOSURE OF INTEREST (IF ANY)

3. PRESENTATION

The Programme Manager will provide a presentation on the Council's property portfolio.

4. SCOPE OF REVIEW (Pages 1 - 12)

To review the scrutiny proposal put forward by Councillors Asif Khan and Steve Rackett and consider the following

- Further information considered necessary to carry out the review
- Discuss the format for future meetings

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To agree the date of the next meeting.

For further information about this meeting, please contact Rosy Wassell in Democracy and Governance on 01923 278375 or by email to legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk

Suggestions for topics to be scrutinised – evaluation table

A Member, Officer or member of the public suggesting a topic for scrutiny must complete Section1 as fully as possible. Completed tables will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny for consideration.

Section 1 – Scrutiny Suggestion	
Proposer: Councillor/Officer/Member of public Councillors Steve Rackett and Asif Khan	
<p>Topic recommended for scrutiny:</p> <p><i>Please include as much detail as is available about the specific such as;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>areas which should be <u>included</u> in the review.</i> • <i>areas which should be <u>excluded</u> from the review.</i> • <i>Whether the focus should be on past performance, future policy or both.</i> 	<p><i>Property Scrutiny</i></p> <p><i>Member led scrutiny of the council's property assets:</i></p> <p><i>Including all property owned by Watford Council</i></p>
<p>Why have you recommended this topic for scrutiny?</p>	<p><i>Members have concerns regarding the council's property portfolio:</i></p> <p><i>whether the council is getting the appropriate rental value</i></p> <p><i>whether the arrangements for lettings to the voluntary sector are fair and reasonable</i></p> <p><i>To review previous performance of property management</i></p>

What are the specific outcomes you wish to see from the review?

Examples might include:

- *To identify what is being done and what the potential barriers are;*
- *To review relevant performance indicators;*
- *To compare our policies with those of a similar authority;*
- *To assess the environmental/social impacts;*
- *To Benchmark current service provision;*
- *To find out community perceptions and experience;*
- *To identify the gap between provision and need*

Identify whether there are any assets the council can dispose of

To look at how the council's involvement in the retail part of its property portfolio is being managed in the current economic climate

To see whether any performance indicators are required in terms of occupancy or income

To look at how similar authorities manage their portfolios

To look at how voluntary sector lets are managed and whether changes need to be made

Examine the optimum level of rents which will produce the greatest revenue from businesses

Look at the lengths of rental agreements.

<p>How do you think evidence might be obtained?</p> <p><i>Examples might include</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires/Surveys • Site visits • Interviewing witnesses • Research • Performance data • Public hearings • Comparisons with other local authorities 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hearings/Witnesses</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Looking at other council's asset management and property policies</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Examine income streams and any projected forecasts of rental income.</i></p>
<p>Does the proposed item meet the following criteria?</p>	
<p>It must affect a group or community of people</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Council owns a number of properties which are let to community groups</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The councils' income from rental and disposal of property impact on revenue and capital funding of the authority</i></p>
<p>It must relate to a service, event or issue in which the council has a significant stake</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>The council owns a significant property portfolio across the borough and its lettings, rental and disposals have impacts on both the commercial and property sector</i></p>

<p>It must not have been a topic of scrutiny within the last 12 months</p> <p><i>There will be exceptions to this arising from notified changing circumstances. Scrutiny will also maintain an interest in the progress of recommendations and issues arising from past reports.</i></p>	<p>Budget Panel received a presentation update on the Property Review as part of the Panel's training programme at its meeting on 29 November 2011.</p> <p>A further update to be presented to Budget Panel at its meeting on 11 March 2013.</p>
<p>It must not be an issue, such as planning or licensing, which is dealt with by another council committee</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
<p>Does the topic meet the council's priorities?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Making Watford a better place to live in 2. To provide the lead for Watford's sustainable economic growth 3. Promoting an active, cohesive and well informed Town 4. To operate the Council efficiently and effectively <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Please confirm which ones</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>It certainly meets 2 and 4, and also 1</i></p>

<p>Are you aware of any limitations of time, other constraints or risks which need to be taken into account?</p> <p><i>Factors to consider are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>forthcoming milestones, demands on the relevant service area and member availability:</i> • <i>imminent policy changes either locally, regionally or nationally within the area under review.</i> 	<p>The work will help increase the income for the council. To examine the reasons behind the current level of income.</p> <p>Changes of policy will include the new business rates.</p>
<p>Does the topic involve a Council partner or other outside body?</p>	<p><i>Voluntary sector partners, Capital Shopping, Chamber of Commerce</i></p>

<p>Are there likely to be any Equality implications which will need to be considered?</p> <p><i>Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Age</i> • <i>Disability</i> • <i>Gender reassignment</i> • <i>Pregnancy or maternity</i> • <i>Race</i> • <i>Religion or belief</i> • <i>Sex</i> • <i>Sexual orientation</i> • <i>Marriage or civil partnership (only in respect of the requirement to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination)</i> 	<p>This will have an impact on voluntary groups which provide a service to people with the protected characteristics.</p> <p>Need to ensure that any changes do not have a negative impact on any of the groups which are covered by the Equality act 2010.</p>
--	---

Sign off	
<p>Councillor/Officer</p> <p>Cllr Steve Rackett and Cllr Asif Khan</p>	<p>Date</p> <p>29/01/13</p>

The following sections to be completed by Democratic Services in consultation with the relevant Head of Service and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as necessary

Section 2	
Consultation with relevant Heads of Service	
<i>It is important to ensure that the relevant service can support a review by providing the necessary documents and attending meetings as necessary. The Head of Service's comments should be obtained before the request to hold a review is put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</i>	
Has the relevant Head of Service been consulted?	<i>Yes/no (if no, please give reason)</i> No discussion with either of the councillors requesting the scrutiny
Is there any current or proposed review of service which would affect this suggestion?	<i>Yes/no (if yes, please provide details)</i> Yes. The property service is subject to service redesign as part of the Council's Road Map, we are seeking to market test the continued in house provision of this service over the next few months. The Managing Director has also asked the service to undertake a property review which has commenced. In addition the service is currently in the process of finalising a number of large property transactions, Charter Place transfer to CSC, Ascot Road lease regear to Morrisons, Health Campus and CRL property related work. The service therefore currently does not have the capacity to support this review.

Is this a topic which the service department(s) is able to support	<p><i>Include HoS comments here</i></p> <p>As stated above the service is currently in the process of finalising a number of large property transactions, Charter Place transfer to CSC, Ascot Road lease regear to Morrisons, Health Campus and CRL property related work. The service therefore currently does not have the capacity to support this review.</p>
When was the last time this service was the subject of a scrutiny review?	<p><i>Include date if known</i></p> <p>Have presented update on property review to Budget Panel last year and due to update Budget Panel at its next meeting.</p>
Is the issue something which will be of significant interest to the public and if so, how should this be managed?	<p>No. May well interest community groups and other third sector organisations who lease from us.</p>
Head of Service consulted and when	<p>Not by proposers of the review.</p>
Completed by	<p>Carol Chen, Head of Legal and Property Services</p>
Date	<p>22 February 2013</p>

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 March 2013

Present: Councillor Collett (Chair)
Councillor Khan (Vice-Chair),
Councillors Bell, Greenslade, Hastrick, Hofman, Jeffree and Rackett

Also present: Councillors Johnson and Meerabux

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head (for minute numbers 54 to 60)
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

63. WORK PROGRAMME AND NEW SCRUTINY SUGGESTIONS

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer including the latest edition of the Work Programme and two scrutiny suggestions for consideration.

Work Programme

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had updated the Work Programme to include all the reports that had been presented throughout the year and those items on which Members had requested updates in the future. She stated that Members would see that some meetings did not currently contain many items and advised that if Members wished to add something to a future meeting they could inform her and she would arrange for a report to be included.

Scrutiny suggestion – Watford Community Housing Trust

The Chair invited Councillor Khan to explain why he had proposed the review into the Watford Community Housing Trust.

Councillor Khan advised that his casework for Housing Trust related matters had increased. He understood that the Trust was currently undergoing a restructure. He questioned the quality of service and value for money provided by the Trust.

The Chair thanked the Councillor for a good suggestion and excellent scope.

At this point Councillor Hastrick declared an interest in the matter as she was on the Housing Trust's Board. She took no part in the discussion about the establishment of a Task Group.

Councillor Bell stated that he had attended the Housing Policy Advisory Group the previous evening. Several suggestions had arisen at that meeting which could be incorporated into the review, for example lettable standards.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she would contact the Housing Strategy Officer for further information.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer referred Members to her report and the list of Councillors who had expressed an interest in taking part in the review.

Members agreed to the list of Councillors and stated that the Task Group should complete its work by June 2013. A report should then be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.

Scrutiny suggestion – Property Services

The Chair invited Councillor Rackett to explain why he had proposed the review into the Council's Property section.

Councillor Rackett said that Councillors had wanted to carry out a review of the service for some time but had continually been told that the service was too busy to take part. He acknowledged the Head of Legal and Property Services' comments attached to the report. He said that due to the huge number of assets held by the Council it was important to review the service. It could be added to the scrutiny programme to take place after the Housing Trust review had been completed. He suggested it could begin in the Summer or Autumn.

Councillor Johnson agreed with the scrutiny proposal. He said that he had been asking for a review for a couple of years. He added that it was important that Councillors knew what was happening. The Council was a property rich borough.

Councillor Khan agreed with the previous Councillors. He suggested that the Task Group should be given a time limit, for example it could begin in September for a set number of meetings.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that Budget Panel had received an update at its last meeting. She would circulate the report and minutes to the Scrutiny Committee and those who had expressed an interest in taking part in the review. The report highlighted the work of the Property Service and the latest information on the Council's property portfolio.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

Councillor Khan proposed that a Task Group be established, commencing in September to review the Property Service. The Head of Legal and Property Services to be notified and advised that if the date were not suitable she should provide another date.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Scrutiny Committee that the Property Team would be transferring from the Head of Legal and Property Services' department to the Head of Planning's department. She was unsure of the exact date as it was dependant on the outcome of a report being considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 April 2013.

RESOLVED –

1. that the rolling work programme be noted
2. that a Task Group be established to review the Watford Community Housing Trust comprising the following Members –
 - Councillor Asif Khan
 - Councillor Jackie Connal
 - Councillor Stephen Johnson
 - Councillor Anne Joynes
 - Councillor Karen Collett
3. that the Task Group reports back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its June meeting.
4. **that a Task Group be established to review the Council's property assets comprising the following Members –**
 - **Councillor Steve Rackett**
 - **Councillor Asif Khan**
 - **Councillor Stephen Johnson**
 - **Councillor Kareen Hastrick**
 - **Councillor Malcolm Meerabux**
5. **that the Head of Legal and Property Services be informed that the Property Services Task Group is to commence in September; if the date is not suitable another date to be provided.**

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

This page is intentionally left blank