

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor K Collett (Chair)
Councillors K Hastrick, A Joynes, A Rindl, S Silver, D Walford,
S Williams and T Williams

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

28 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Silver replaced Councillor Topping, Councillor S Williams replaced Councillor Dhindsa and Councillor T Williams replaced Councillor Crout.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Khan.

29 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

There were no disclosures of interests.

30 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2015 were submitted and signed.

31 CALL-IN

No Executive decisions had been called in.

32 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Scrutiny Committee received a list of outstanding Actions and Questions. Members noted the updates.

ED9 Economic Development Strategy

Following a question about councillor involvement with the development of the Economic Development Strategy, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the Strategy had not been discussed by Scrutiny during development. It was possible that an update could be provided to councillors at a later date.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer added that the Economic Development Manager had attended Budget Panel in 2014 and provided an overview of economic growth in Watford.

It was noted that the Economic Development Strategy had been approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 7 September 2015 and the decision had not been called in.

PI39 Complaints resolved at Stage 1 and complaints resolved within 10 days

Councillor Rindl noted that the response for this action was still outstanding even though it had originally been raised in 2014. She asked when the information about reasons for unresolved complaints would be made available.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head informed the Scrutiny Committee that there was an ongoing problem with the software (Lagan). Leadership Team was also concerned about the lack of information available on this area. The Customer Service Section Head had been asked to manually record details of the complaints. This was already in place for Freedom of Information requests via a spreadsheet. The information would be reported to Leadership Team and it could also be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer assured Members that the complaints continued to be processed through the Council's Complaints procedure.

PI46 Affordable homes on identified sites

The Chair informed the Scrutiny Committee that the next Housing Policy Advisory Group had been moved as Richard Harrington MP was no longer able to attend the original date. The meeting was now due to take place on 6 October 2015.

MCA1 Management of Conservation Areas

Councillor S Williams asked whether the new Task Group was about the Yellow and Red Lion public house in Vicarage Road.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the Task Group had been set up to review the management of all conservation areas. It would investigate how action was taken if people breached planning rules in conservation areas. It would also look at information about conservation areas and how local residents were made aware of the relevant rules for the area.

RESOLVED –

1. that the update be noted.

2. that information about complaints be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as it is made available.

33

UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MEASURES (IN-HOUSE SERVICES) - QUARTER 1: (APRIL - JUNE) 2015/16

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head which provided the Quarter 1 2015/16 results for the performance measures for in-house services.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that she had contacted the Customer Services Section Head for the outstanding results related to the waiting times in the Customer Service Centre for Revenues and Benefits enquiries. The service had originally provided the waiting times for responding to telephone calls. There continued to be concerns about the availability of temporary accommodation, including placement into the private sector. The number of households living in temporary accommodation had stabilised. There was expected to be a pressure on councils across the country when the refugees arrived in the country.

CS4 – Number of households living in temporary accommodation

Councillor Rindl noted the comment that this measure had stabilised during this quarter. She asked how Watford compared with other areas.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head suggested that if Watford was compared to other local authorities in Hertfordshire it would not compare very well. It was more likely that Watford would be comparable to London Boroughs or Luton.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer added that the Interim Housing Section Head had reported to the Scrutiny Committee at its last meeting and some information had been provided. She would check the report and advise Members.

Following a question from Councillor S Williams, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head stated that the figure related to households and not individuals. It was suggested that a definition of 'household' should be provided. the Committee and Scrutiny Officer commented that she would ask whether the information would be broken down further.

CS5 – Number of private sector units secured for use under HomeLet

In response to a question from Councillor Rindl, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that a review of HomeLet was being undertaken as part of a wider project being carried out into solutions for temporary accommodation in Watford.

Councillor Rindl said that she had spoken to Joy Hobbs from the Watford and Three Rivers Refugee Partnership about this matter. She had advised of a scheme organised by Social Services. They placed people in properties which other people were happy to let to the service. It was cheaper than bed and breakfast and the rent was paid direct to the landlord.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head informed Members that a survey had been carried out and the results had shown that where people had a bad experience letting their properties through the scheme, they were less willing to do so in the future.

The Chair stated that she had spoken to Watford Community Housing Trust about getting empty accommodation back into use. She added that one issue was that Housing Benefit was not paid direct to the landlord. It had to be paid to the tenant unless they agreed for the rent to be paid to the landlord.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the Interim Housing Section Head was looking at short term solutions and the Council's role in the long term. Unfortunately there were no quick solutions to this matter.

CS6 – Number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation and nightly lets who are pregnant/with dependent children

Councillor Joynes asked whether officers were able to advise whether distances to schools was taken into account when deciding where to place families.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the accommodation was not always within Watford's boundary.

Staff sickness

The Chair noted that staff sickness levels were no longer reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Members were advised that the performance measures were reported to Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel. There were varying views about which scrutiny committee should receive the information. The Partnerships and Performance Section Head felt that as Watford Borough Council was the lead authority there was a case for it to be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The opposing theory was that it was still part of the Shared Services Agreement and should therefore be reported to Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head commented that due to the future changes to ICT provision, some parts of that service may be delivered by Watford Borough Council. Further clarification would be sought.

RESOLVED –

that the performance of the council's performance measures for those areas where the council directly delivers the service / area of work at the end of Quarter 1 2015/16 and Overview and Scrutiny Committee's comments be noted.

34

PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE: CONTROLLED PARKING ZONES

The Scrutiny Committee received an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the Controlled Parking Zones (Policies) Task Group.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer provided the following update to recommendations 11, 14 and 19 on behalf of the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head –

“The Council is shortly to consolidate all its Controlled Parking Zone amendments that have been made since 2010 into a new consolidation order. It is proposed to incorporate the Task Group's recommendations into this order. It is anticipated that this will be completed by the end of the financial year.”

Members were pleased to note that officers had accepted Councillor Silver's amendment in June, requesting the increase in the age limit from 16 to 18.

RESOLVED –

1. that the responses to the recommendations be noted.
2. that no further follow up is required.

35

EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report 2015/16.

Following a request from Councillor Rindl, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained about the 'Special Urgency' reference for the approval to extend the lease at Ascot Road. The information was set out in the Council's Constitution under the Access to Information Procedure Rules. She advised that if officers had not met the 28 day notification deadline for key decisions they could request that the 'General Exception' or 'Special Urgency' procedures be used.

The 'General Exception' procedure required the Head of Democracy and Governance to inform the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or in her absence the Chairman of Watford Borough Council, of the required decision. A notice was also placed on the Council's website, incorporated in the Notice of Executive decisions.

The 'Special Urgency' procedure might be requested when a decision needed to be taken by a certain date and there was insufficient time for the 28 days notification period or call-in. The approval of the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or in her absence the Chairman of Watford Borough Council, was requested. Once the Chair agreed to the decision being taken a notice was placed on the Council's website, again incorporated in the Notice of Executive decisions.

The Chair informed Members that when she was approached for her approval she thoroughly checked the reasons for the urgency. She regularly asked officers for further information before giving her final agreement to the decision taking place.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

36

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillor Kareen Hastrick, the Council's appointed representative to the Health Scrutiny Committee, informed Members that the next meeting was due to take place on 1 October 2015 at County Hall. The agenda included the Care Quality Commission's recently published report on the state of the West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust. The report and its summary was published on the County Council's website. She had noted that five months had passed since the inspection had been carried out and already some work had been carried out.

It was agreed that the Committee and Scrutiny Officer would circulate the link to the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

1. that the update be noted.
2. that the link to the agenda on the County Council's website be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

37

BUDGET PANEL

The Scrutiny Committee noted that Budget Panel met on 2 September 2015. It was noted that the Panel had received some training and looked at the latest edition of the Finance Digest.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

38 **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

The Scrutiny Committee noted that Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel met on 10 September 2015. The main item on the agenda had been ICT and the contract with Capita.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

39 **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

It was noted that the Community Safety Partnership's first meeting was due to take place on 21 October 2015. At this meeting the Chair would be elected.

40 **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Thursday 22 October 2015 (For call-in only)
- Wednesday 18 November 2015
- Wednesday 16 December 2015 (For call-in only)

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.45 pm