

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

21 July 2016

Present: Councillor K Hastrick (Chair)  
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Fahmy, A Grimston, J Johnson, Asif Khan, R Martins,  
N Shah and D Walford

Also present: Councillor Nigel Bell (Call-in member), Councillor Anne Joynes  
(Call-in member), Councillor Mo Mills (Call-in member),  
Councillor Karen Collett, Councillor Peter Taylor, Libby  
Truscott, Sophie Wilson and Steve Harvey

Officers: Head of Community and Customer Services  
Legal and Democratic Section Head  
Partnerships and Performance Section Head  
Culture and Community Section Head  
Environmental Services Client Manager (Parks & Streets)  
Communications and Engagement Section Head  
Democratic Services Manager  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

### 14 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Grimston replaced Councillor Rindl and Councillor J Johnson replaced Councillor Williams.

### 15 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interests.

### 16 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2016 were submitted and signed.

Councillor Dhindsa took the Chair for the next part of the meeting.

### 17 **Call-in: Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds**

The Cabinet decision taken on 4 July 2016, minute reference 18, regarding 'Investment in Watford's Adventure Playgrounds' had been called in by

Councillors Bell, Joynes and Mills. The reason for the call-in had been included in the agenda. The scrutiny committee had received a copy of the report to Cabinet, the minutes from Cabinet's meeting on 4 July, the completed call-in request and the call-in procedures.

Following a brief introduction by the Chair, Councillor Dhindsa, the Legal and Democratic Section Head was asked to explain the role of the committee.

The Legal and Democratic Section Head explained about call-in and the scrutiny committee's role in considering the call-in request. The procedures were included with the agenda. He reminded members that there were two possible decisions that could be made. The first would be to ratify Cabinet's original decision and the other was to refer the decision back to Cabinet giving reasons why Cabinet should re-consider its decision.

Councillor Bell was invited to present his reasons for calling in Cabinet's decision.

Councillor Bell quoted the original reason for calling in the decision. There had been a lack of consultation and lack of alternative options put forward by the Mayor and her Cabinet. The playgrounds had a unique history and had experienced and trusted staff. The loss of these playgrounds would destroy unique cultural safe areas within the town. He referred to the savings that had been included in the budget in January, but the details had not been revealed until the report to Cabinet in July.

Councillor Bell asked why there had been no consultation in the months leading up to the report to Cabinet. He questioned that if Cabinet strongly felt the supervised playgrounds had to go why they had not spoken to children, parents and staff, including their union representatives to find a consensual way forward. He referred to the 2010 play review, which was six years old. He asked why there had been no effort in using staff and parents to look at other councils and their play services.

Councillor Bell said that the Mayor had commented about getting more families using playgrounds and that removing the current provision would encourage more families to access the sites. The new proposal may create a more 'open' facility, but it would mean the loss of the supervision, which was trusted by parents.

Councillor Bell commented that it would be said that children's services and play were not the council's responsibility. The Government and county council's policy was early intervention. He suggested the council could have used the expertise of the county's children's services and other authorities to see how a

plan could be put together to keep these unique facilities open. He said that cutting these services could lead to vulnerable families being disadvantaged.

Councillor Bell finished by saying that he would speak about financial matters later. He advised that there were three people he had invited to speak about the matter.

The Chair invited Councillors Joynes and Mills to speak in support of the call-in.

Councillor Joynes said that the lack of consultation was at the nub of the review. There had also been a misunderstanding between adventure playgrounds and equipment put in a play park. Councillor Joynes gave some background information about adventure playgrounds and how they had started. She quoted from two pieces of work which had described adventure playgrounds; one had been produced for Play Wales and the other was by the founder of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education.

Councillor Joynes commented that one release she had read indicated that not many children used the facilities. She had asked for information about the numbers of children using the facilities but had not received an answer. She had also requested information about where the children came from, as a comment had been that only local children were using the playgrounds. However, she had understood that children came from a wider area. She also referred to a comment she had heard about it being “cheap childminding”. This was an appalling comment. The parents of the children using the playgrounds paid taxes and therefore it was not a ‘free’ service. The council tax paid by everyone was used to serve the community by the local council. These adventure playgrounds served the community.

Councillor Mills commented that Councillors Bell and Joynes had made most of her points. She asked what strategy the Liberal Democrat administration had in place for Watford’s working class children. There had been no consultation with young people; neither had they been given any input into the planning. The children had built the adventure playgrounds; they had the ideas. It had not been a construction company. The Mayor had commented that many of the playgrounds in London had been closed; however there were a lot of playgrounds still open. Some of these playgrounds were self-funded.

Councillor Bell introduced Libby Truscott, who had started the online petition, and Sophie Williams, a parent, who had spoken at Cabinet. They would be followed by Steve Harvey who was the Chair of Friends of Harebreaks Wood.

Libby Truscott provided the scrutiny committee with details of her background in play work. She stated that the campaign had several concerns that she wished

to raise about the process and irregularities that had occurred. The first concern was about the rise in anti-social behaviour that would occur if the adventure playgrounds were removed. She gave the example of a rise in localised anti-social behaviour when North East Somerset Council closed its youth and play services.

Ms Truscott said the campaign also had concerns about the budget and how it had been worked out. The information had not been shared with Save Watford's Adventure Playgrounds campaign, Labour councillors or the staff. She stated that there was a supposed potential saving of £250,000 and an investment of £1.25 million in changing the service from an adventure playground. She suggested that there may be a saving by removing staff, but there would still be the maintenance of structures, daily site checks to look for any abuse of the equipment and potential costs related to anti-social behaviour. She questioned that the suggested savings of £250,000 would be achieved. She asked that the council provided a detailed breakdown of the finances.

Ms Truscott referred to recent marketing material and said that it had been misleading. She said that there was a misunderstanding in the definition of an adventure playground. Information circulated by the campaign to councillors set out that an adventure playground must be staffed. If it was not staffed then it could not be called an adventure playground.

Ms Truscott said that the council had a statutory duty to consult the public as it was a change of service. The service was not being continued as the adventure playgrounds were being closed; the staff removed; removing buildings and replacing with fixed equipment and turning it into a park.

Ms Truscott said that she wished to comment on how the adventure playgrounds were widely used. She advised that although she was not a resident of Watford her daughter used the service with her friends. She was also aware of people travelling from Hemel Hempstead even though there were four adventure playgrounds in that area. She felt this said a lot for the service. It would be devastating to lose the service.

Sophie Wilson commented that at Cabinet she had mentioned that she had witnessed drug dealing in Harebreaks playground, which was outside the adventure playground. She had reported this to the police. In the woods it was possible to see drugs paraphernalia. One of her concerns was about the new static playground and possible vandalism. She referred to an incident in Meriden at the football pitch where there had been arson. If the new equipment was vandalised, she questioned whether the site would be demolished and flats would be built on the land.

Ms Wilson said that the council would not be providing a new adventure playground as it did not meet the definition. The council would be taking away so much from the community. She wanted a proper consultation over six months.

Steve Harvey informed the scrutiny committee that he was the chair of Friends of Harebreaks Woods and previously connected to other local organisations that had links with Harebreaks Adventure Playgrounds. He explained about an event at the North Watford Show that he said was linked to the adventure playground and the work carried out by its staff. He had heard that all the adventure playgrounds provided was childcare and were not well attended. He regularly passed the Harebreaks Adventure Playground and it was very well attended.

Mr Harvey said that there were concerns about anti-social behaviour. He had read that drug abuse was not a problem in Watford; however he questioned whether anyone had been in to any isolated place in Watford. He said that any isolated place in Watford had solvent abuse. He had seen the evidence in Harebreaks Woods on the regular 'clean up' days. He said that if the staff were removed the problem would get worse. Mr Harvey explained how he and the Friends of Harebreaks Woods had worked with the Harebreaks Adventure Playground to create a cycle track within the site. This had led to fewer mountain bikes being ridden through the woods and damage created to the natural environment. He had been told that a cycle track may be provided in Oxhey, but he did not think young people would ride from the Harebreaks to Oxhey in order to use the cycle track. It was also unlikely that parents would let them ride that far.

Mr Harvey then referred to the lack of consultation. The first he had heard was a week before Cabinet. It had referred to two drop-in sessions that would be taking place after the Cabinet meeting. He questioned how it was possible to consult on something that had already happened. He had no doubt that there had been no consultation.

Mr Harvey said that looking into the future there had been various schemes proposed by the campaigners. He suggested that Watford Borough Council could second an officer, not a consultant, to draw up some possibilities for another scheme; give the campaigners an opportunity to draw up a co-operative or trust to keep the two adventure playgrounds going. The adventure playgrounds were desperately needed. He cautioned that if someone did not work with disaffected young people, disaffected people did bad things. This was not wanted in Watford.

The Chair thanked the speakers and Councillors Bell, Joynes and Mills.

Councillor Grimston referred to Councillor Bell's comments about the changes to the budget in January. She asked him why he did not question the information if he did not understand what was happening. She then thanked the speakers for their comments. She noted that people travelled to the adventure playgrounds from Hemel Hempstead, which was 7.7 miles from Watford, however it had been said that people would be unwilling to travel 3.4 miles from Harebreaks to Oxhey.

Councillor Bell responded to the budget question. He said on page 17 of the budget report there was a reduction in culture and play staffing costs of £25,000 and then a further reduction of £30,000 in the Customer Service Centre. He had assumed it related to the deletion of a post. There was no reference to saving £250,000.

Councillor Hastrick said that she wished to clarify about the incident in Meriden which had been mentioned by one of the speakers. The football area had not been burnt down. The playing area had been shut down when unsupervised. She added that Meriden had benefitted from an excellent new playground and there had been no vandalism.

Councillor J Johnson noted the comments made by the speakers and councillors about the types of services provided to the children, including drama, dance and music. She questioned that if these were to be taken away were the speakers saying that there would be anti-social behaviour. She also asked whether they were saying that the council should be responsible for providing these facilities to the children.

Councillor Bell responded that he felt that the two supervised sites should not close and the workers should not be made redundant. His party would not do that and the administration should re-consider this. The staff were well respected and parents trusted them and felt that they could leave their children at the sites.

Councillor Joynes added that there were hidden benefits of having staff there. Children were able to develop their social skills which helped in the future. Staff were a listening ear. Children were able to challenge themselves. They helped the children to do what they wanted to do. Their work was invaluable.

Councillor Martins referred to a comment made by Libby Truscott. She had said that Labour councillors had not been given the budget information. He said that as a member of Budget Panel, Councillor Bell would have received the budget papers. He asked Councillor Bell to comment on that statement. He also put a further question to Councillor Bell about whether play had changed and moved on and how it was provided. He referred to the decision to invest £1.25 million

in play; he questioned whether Councillor Bell felt that the council should not invest those funds.

Councillor Bell replied that he welcomed the proposed upgrade to the play facilities and the new spending this involved. However the issue was about the supervision at the two adventure playgrounds. These were unique sites. He was not referring to the other playgrounds in the town. The new facilities would not make them adventure playgrounds. Staff would be available for only eight weeks, at Easter and the summer holidays. Over 2,000 people had signed the petition in a short time, as it was about two unique facilities.

Councillor Bell confirmed that he had the budget information at the time the budget was being set. However since the decision had been made he had asked the Head of Community and Customer Services for the play review. He had received the 2010 play review but nothing else. The updated play review had not been provided. He did not know if any councillors had seen it, including the portfolio holders. In order to make the recent decision councillors must have seen the 2016 play review as he could not imagine the decision was passed on the review carried out in 2010.

Councillor Khan asked Councillor Mills if she could relate some of her experience of working at the adventure playgrounds and what people had said to her about their experiences.

Councillor Mills informed the scrutiny committee that she had worked at both adventure playgrounds for over 15 years. They were brilliant, but very different. She met people now who had played at the playgrounds. One person had commented that if it had not been for the playground he would have been in prison. One had written to the Watford Observer about his experience; it was his 'escape'. She said that she could not speak highly enough about them. She had gone on to train as a youth worker and had continued at the playgrounds helping young people get bronze, silver and gold youth awards.

Councillor Taylor, Portfolio Holder, referred to the comments about the budget and the saving of £25,000; on the same table, three rows above, there was reference to a play review and savings of £150,000. The information had been provided. He felt that by only referring to the £25,000 was misleading for this committee.

Councillor Bell responded that the Mayor had mentioned this at Cabinet and had asked him why he had not raised the savings at the budget meeting. He referred to the statement about the play review being carried out in 2016/17 and the expected savings. However he had not seen the play review referred to in the

table. The savings mentioned were £150,000 and not £250,000 as quoted in the Cabinet report. There was no reference to job losses.

Following a request from the Chair, the Head of Community and Customer Services explained that the review referred to a review of the play service; a review of the service that he had conducted; an internal review. The service was trying to achieve its objectives to improve play but reduce revenue spending. There had not been a document called Play Review 2016/17 that could be shared with councillors.

Councillor Bell responded that he felt the budget papers had been misleading. There was no reference to an internal review. He added that when he had asked to see the review he would have liked to have seen the one carried out, even if it was an internal review. Councillor Bell said that he believed the scrutiny committee should return the decision to Cabinet and for the correct financial figures to be provided, especially as the members did not have the correct information at the meeting.

Councillor Dhindsa invited the portfolio holders and officers to explain the decision.

Councillor Collett, Portfolio Holder for Community, said that the council needed to extend opportunities for five to 15 year olds across the Borough. She informed the scrutiny committee that both sites were closed one day each week and during term times the opening hours were quite short. She was aware of children outside the estate and elsewhere in the Borough that would like to use the playgrounds, but they were locked. She explained about a visit she had undertaken with the previous portfolio holder Councillor Crout. They had visited several locations but had not found any play rangers and had noted that Harebreaks was shut. At Leavesden playground there had been play rangers available. She recognised some children and realised they were not joining in with the play rangers' activities. When questioned, the children had responded that it was too 'babyish' for them. She was aware that young children did use the service.

Councillor Collett stated that the council was in a difficult situation. Out of 55 local authorities, 12 had closed their play services, including adventure playgrounds. The council had recently held two drop-in sessions about the two sites, providing an opportunity for people to come and say what was wanted on the sites. Only eight people turned up. She acknowledged that Mr Harvey had attended the meeting and had made valid points, including possible danger for younger children. These suggestions had been useful and the council would be implementing them. This was the type of information the council wanted to hear. She referred to how in the past children played with other children and



not adults. She quoted child psychologists, who said how children learnt from each other and developed their social and mental skills. She added that nursery schools, key stage one and two, children were enabled to develop their well-being. Nurseries had to show through their Ofsted assessments about child development.

Councillor Collett stated that the council would still be keeping adventure playgrounds. Many local authorities had closed them down. She referred to Islington, which had been mentioned by Councillor Mills. Parents and other people in the community had come together to keep the playground running. Councillor Collett said that with the new scheme the gates would be open every day. A service would be provided at Easter and in the summer holidays. This would not be removed as it had in other local authorities. There were only three councils within Hertfordshire that still maintained adventure playgrounds.

Councillor Collett stressed that the council was bound by statutory duty and was required to provide certain services, including emptying bins, meeting housing needs and benefits. If the service was to continue in its current format other services would be affected. However, the proposal ensured that children would still have play facilities.

Following a short interruption when the Chair spoke to the public, Councillor Collett referred to comments about anti-social behaviour. She advised that the council was under no illusion about this matter. Children with the right guidance would grow into good people. She regularly took part in the clean up days at Alban Wood. If she saw any drugs paraphernalia she reported to the police. The police would then patrol the area. If they caught any children they were taken home to their parents. The same occurred in other towns and cities around the country. She suggested that if people saw any anti-social behaviour they should call 101 and report it to the police.

Councillor Taylor said that he would speak about financial matters. He stated that the Council was required to make savings of £4.5 million. By 2019/20 there would be no Revenue Support Grant received from the Government. The savings acquired from this decision would be £250,000 each year. However, the council was investing in better facilities that would be open all week and all hours. The council had to consider the services it had to provide and this was one of the choices it had been decided to make. The Cabinet administration had the right to make the decision and how it would prioritise the council's spending. The council would then ask people about the facilities being provided.

The Head of Community and Customer Services added that in January 2015 the Council had identified an efficiency saving of £100,000 for 2015/16. In January 2016 an additional £150,000 had been identified as a potential saving in

2017/18. The two figures combined made up the £250,000 quoted in the Cabinet report. The £25,000 referred to the culture and play section. This was a large section, covering the Museum, events and play, and referred to a reduction in hours allocated to the Events Officer's post. In the same budget papers presented to Cabinet in January 2016 there was an unavoidable growth item of £100,000 for the current financial year. The reason for this was that the original reduction had been delayed for a year. He appreciated that the budget papers for 2016/17 did not state that the £150,000 saving was in addition to the £100,000 identified previously. He explained the reason for the additional savings, which had followed after the autumn statement in 2015. He advised that the council had wanted to improve the service, but make savings. This had led to a transformational approach. The result of his review had shown a large capital investment to give revenue savings, which meant the removal of the supervised service.

Following a question from Councillor Walford about the council's budget stabilising in the next few years, Councillor Taylor responded that the council had already been told it needed to make savings of £4.5 million over a four-year period; he would be surprised if this changed. It was projected that the economy was likely to get worse. The council was required to make big savings and there would be difficult decisions. He did not see the situation improving.

Councillor Mills referred to Councillor Taylor's comments about the play structures. She said that there had been no input by children. Consultation was important. She mentioned a scheme in London that was being run as a mutual association, which had been a spin off from the local council. It had government support. She asked for an explanation why the Council could not have consulted on doing something similar.

Councillor Collett agreed that there were many schemes in London which ran as mutual associations. Due to the current financial situation there had not been the opportunity to consult. It would have given people false hope. The scheme referred to in Islington had been set up by parents and the local community. Some councils had more resources than Watford. The adventure playgrounds had been in place for over 40 years. At that time the council was in a better financial position. The financial situation had now changed. The news indicated that there would be more cuts coming. If the council did not need to make savings then the report would not have been presented to Cabinet. The play review would not have been carried out in 2010. This change showed the meaning of austerity.

Councillor Joynes questioned whether the executive would listen if the staff working at the adventure playground and others asked for a stay of time and were able to come forward with a sound financial plan for the future.

Councillor Taylor advised that the service was not being cut with immediate effect; it would remain open until October. Councillor Collett had spoken to Ms Wilson about a parent-led scheme. The executive was happy to discuss alternative provision, but Cabinet had made the decision that the council could not afford to pay the staff.

Councillor Bell acknowledged that the council had to provide the statutory services. It was the executive's political decision to make these cuts. It was not necessary to make the adventure playground staff redundant. The council had over £20 million in its reserves. He felt that if the council valued the staff, took time to speak to the staff and parents, it could work with them to find a way forward and to carry on with the supervised staff. It could show it valued the service. The Labour group would consider the £20 million in reserves; look at the other schemes being done; the investment in Northampton and other properties. It would use some of that instead of cutting the supervised staff.

Councillor Taylor responded that Councillor Bell was correct stating it was a political decision; it was a difficult decision. He had read in today's newspaper that Leeds council was considering cutting 2,000 staff. Watford Borough Council was focussed on protecting front line services. The council had to prioritise and it had been decided that there would be adventure playgrounds, but parents and carers would look after children. The scrutiny committee would need to consider whether Cabinet had the right to make the decision. Cabinet felt it did have that right.

Councillor Fahmy asked the portfolio holders to confirm that the adventure playgrounds would be closed and the alternative would be a 'sterile' place and would not look like the original.

Councillor Collett advised that she had looked at the plans over the last few weeks and were in further discussions with officers to put more of a 'wow factor' into the plans. An adventure playground should look more like an adventure playground and not like other parks. They had to fit into their local environment, especially Harebreaks. In the review children had said they wanted to play within the environment. She stated the adventure playgrounds were staying open.

The Chair asked for clarification that the adventure playgrounds would be staying open without staff.

Councillor Taylor remarked that there had been comments about flats being built on the sites. The council would not be spending over £1 million on the sites and then build flats.

The Chair said that the benefit of having the staff there was different to having a modernised playground.

Councillor Fahmy said that he had noted that there would be supervised schemes during Easter and the summer. He asked whether it had been considered to include supervised play at other times during the year.

The Head of Community and Customer Services confirmed that the supervised play was only for the two weeks at Easter and six weeks during the summer.

Following a question from the chair about future staffing, the Head of Community and Customer Services informed the scrutiny committee that it would not be supervised play like the current arrangements. There would be play activities which would be commissioned through the procurement process. It would be a commissioned service and therefore unlikely that the council would employ people.

The Chair questioned what type of rapport would be built up between the staff and children. Currently the children had a rapport with the staff and respect them. They were like mentors. These new people would come for the two or six weeks and go away again. It was unlikely the children would see them again.

The Head of Community and Customer Services confirmed this was correct.

Councillor Shah asked what the impact would be on future generations of Watford's children and whether it was short-sighted.

Councillor Collett responded that there were other areas that did not have adventure playgrounds. Callowland recreation ground was regularly full; children were playing on the field and on the equipment. She questioned whether people were implying that the parks all over Watford were going to be damaged. Young people usually played with each other and not with adults in attendance. Times changed and children now played on laptops.

Councillor Shah said that she knew of families that came from Central and Meriden to use the Harwoods adventure playground. She had taken her youngest two children to the adventure playground. It had taken her a year to feel she could trust the staff and leave her children there. She commented that as a parent she did not feel that the new proposal was right.

Councillor Khan commented that the decision was short-sighted and had been taken without due consideration. He did not feel the financial argument stood up. He had looked at the budgets and felt it could be accommodated if there

was a political will for the current scheme. The Mayor had clearly stated she did not want to do it. He asked the portfolio holders to look at alternatives. He requested that the administration was clear in its literature that there would be no supervised play as there had been for 40 years.

Councillor Bell summed up and said that there had been a good debate. He had called in the decision due to a lack of consultation and alternatives had not been considered. He had hoped that more time could have been made to do this. He understood that the administration would wait until 31 October, but he would have hoped it could have been longer.

Councillor Bell reminded members that Overview and Scrutiny Committee was supposed to be non-political and it should look at the executive decision. The scrutiny committee should look at the decision objectively and consider asking Cabinet to look at the decision again. He did not feel the scrutiny committee could agree with the Cabinet decision based on the financial information. It needed a full and frank explanation. He considered that the scrutiny committee owed it to everyone to send the decision back to Cabinet and ask for the decision to be reviewed.

Councillor Khan said that supervision was the key to this matter. Supervision provided the softer skills that children needed. The decision was short-sighted as there would be a greater financial loss over the years to come. He had recently walked round one of the sites and the children were being taught life skills by the staff. This would not be achieved in an unsupervised site. It was a short-sighted decision which should be thought about again; alternatives considered; budgets looked at again.

Councillor Martins advised that he had come to the meeting open-minded. He had looked at the report and listened to the debate and felt that Cabinet had come to its decision reluctantly. The council had to make savings; it had no choice. The council wanted to keep council tax down but still provide services. It was necessary to find other way of doing things. The decision in front of the scrutiny committee was changing the way facilities were provided. More children would be able to access the space. He liked the suggestion he had heard that residents wanted to work with the council to deliver the service in a needs based way, which the children wanted. In his view community groups were better placed to develop children.

Councillor Martins commented that as a Central Ward councillor he had heard similar issues raised when the multi-use games area was being built. The site was unsupervised and there were few complaints from the police or residents about anti-social behaviour. In the end the reality was not as bad as they had thought it would be. He said that he did not see any reasons to send the

decision back to Cabinet. However, he urged Cabinet and the council to make a commitment to work with parents. He reminded everyone that ward councillors and county councillors had community budgets and residents could look for funding from those alternative funds. The key focus had to be the children.

Councillor Hastrick said that she was a little worried that children had to be taught how to play and not working it out for themselves. The council had to make a financial decision for the whole of Watford. The financial position meant that cuts had to be made. As a county councillor she was aware of cuts the county council was making; some of which were heart-breaking. Central Government had to be blamed for the cuts. Money was short and councils had to make horrible decisions.

The Chair commented that no-one denied that there were financial problems. The council had £20 million in reserves. It was investing in properties outside of Watford. He felt that the council should work with community groups, parents and children. He questioned whether the children had been consulted. If any suggestions did not work out then Cabinet's decision could be brought in next year. Councillor Dhindsa referred to his work in the prison service and how he had seen the outcomes of those children who did not have the privileges that well-off children had. The children using these facilities did not have gardens to play in. They lived in flats. Having listened to the discussions he felt the council should listen to the children and have a consultation period. The parents may be able to raise funds to avoid the staff going. These opportunities had not been explored. If it did not work in the future then tell them that there was no other alternative.

Councillor Khan moved that "the decision be sent back to Cabinet in order to consult with parents, families, children and other interested parties, to find other options to maintain supervised play in the Harebreaks and Harwoods play areas."

In accordance with Standing Committee Procedure Rules, paragraph 4.2, Councillor Shah requested that it be recorded in the minutes how Members cast their votes.

**Those Members voting for the motion**

Councillors Dhindsa, Khan and Shah

**Those Members voting against the motion**

Councillors Fahmy, Grimston, Hastrick, J Johnson, Martins and Walford

There were no abstentions.

The motion was declared to be LOST by 3 votes to 6.

Councillor Hastrick moved “that Cabinet’s decision be ratified and that the council moves forward on that decision.”

In accordance with Standing Committee Procedure Rules, paragraph 4.2, Councillor Shah requested that it be recorded in the minutes how Members cast their votes.

**Those Members voting for the motion**

Councillors Fahmy, Grimston, Hastrick, J Johnson, Martins and Walford

**Those Members voting against the motion**

Councillors Dhindsa, Khan and Shah

There were no abstentions.

The motion was declared to be CARRIED by 6 votes to 3.

RESOLVED –

that Cabinet’s decision be ratified and that the council moves forward on that decision.

The Chair said that he wished to thank everyone and that there had been a good debate.

At this point the scrutiny committee was adjourned for five minutes.

Councillor Hastrick took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

18

**End of year (2015/16) Key Performance Indicator Report**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head setting out the results of the key performance indicators for in-house services at the end of 2015/16.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised members that if they had any other areas they would like included in future reports they should let her know. She would work with the services to provide that information. Following a request the information had been set out in a new format.

In response to a question from Councillor Khan about the number of households in bed and breakfast, who were pregnant or with dependent children, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head explained that the council had a statutory duty to ensure that these applicants should not be in this type of accommodation for more than six weeks. The council was looking at innovative ways of finding accommodation. The Housing Section Head and the previous officer were looking at new ideas.

Councillor Dhindsa questioned whether the council would be able to meet the proposed target for the number of households living in temporary accommodation.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that the council was looking at ways of acquiring accommodation including outside the borough and working with private sector landlords. It was a challenging area. The council had agreed that housing was one of its objectives and this showed its importance.

Councillor Dhindsa referred to some casework he had and how the person had been offered accommodation in London, even though the children went to school in Watford and the person worked in Watford.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head assured members that officers did consider people's needs as much as they could; however, they had to take into account the level of demand and the availability of properties.

The Chair mentioned how she had raised the matter of an empty housing association property close to where she lived. This property was now being brought back into use. She urged all councillors to speak to officers about any empty properties they were aware of in their wards.

In response to a question from Councillor Martins about the revenues and benefits response times not being included in the results on indicator 10, the Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that she would obtain this information for the scrutiny committee. It was not felt that revenues and benefits response times should be included as the enquiries were usually more complicated. It would not be fair to set the same target.

Councillor Martins was concerned as he had received complaints that people were passed from one officer to another.



RESOLVED –

1. that the performance of the identified in-house service indicators at the end of quarter 4 (January – March 2016) be noted.
2. that the proposed targets for 2016/17 be noted.
3. that the committee informs the Partnerships and Performance Section Head if there are any other areas / indicators that need to be included in the 2016/17 suite of indicators.
4. that the indicators be reported to the committee on a quarterly basis.
5. that the actions requested be undertaken.

19 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report for 2016/17.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

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

Councillor Hastrick informed the Scrutiny Committee that the county's Health Scrutiny Committee had met recently. She would ask the Committee and Scrutiny Officer to ensure that all members of this committee were provided with access to the minutes.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee be provided with the minutes of the recent Health Scrutiny Committee.

21 **Budget Panel**

The Chair stated that the Committee and Scrutiny Officer would circulate the minutes of Budget Panel's last meeting for information.

22           **Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel**

The Chair stated that the Committee and Scrutiny Officer would circulate the minutes of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel's last meeting.

23           **Community Safety Partnership Task Group**

It was noted that the first meeting of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group was not due to take place until October.

24           **Parking Strategy (Year 1 recommendations) Task Group - Update**

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the scrutiny committee that the Parking Strategy Task Group had met on two occasions. The members had discussed proposed recommendations to changes to several parking arrangements in the town centre. There were approximately 11 recommendations which looked at shared parking arrangements for different users and new allocated parking areas for specific users. The task group's final report was currently being drafted for inclusion with the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head's report to Cabinet in September. It was agreed that the final report would be circulated to Overview and Scrutiny Committee prior to it being presented to Cabinet.

The Chair stated that she would be attending Cabinet and asked members to review the final report and let her know if there were any issues that they wanted her to raise with Cabinet.

Members were concerned that a precedent was being set, by Cabinet receiving the report prior to it being agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer assured members that she would always try to present the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the first instance. However, on this occasion the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head needed to present his report to Cabinet in September in order to meet the timescale to introduce any new parking arrangements before April next year. If the officer's recommendations were agreed by Cabinet, traffic regulation orders would need to be advertised inviting comments from local residents, businesses and councillors.

25           **Neighbourhood Forum Task Group - Update**

The Chair informed the scrutiny committee that the task group had held its first meeting and had elected Councillor Stephen Cavinder as Chair. The aim would

be to present the report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee with its recommendation about Neighbourhood Forums.

26

**Dates of Next Meetings**

- Wednesday 28 September 2016
- Thursday 27 October 2016 (for call-in only)
- Thursday 24 November 2016

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 9.15 pm