

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 March 2017

Present: Councillor K Hastrick (Chair)  
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Fahmy, Asif Khan (for minute numbers 74 to 78),  
R Martins, N Shah (for minute numbers 78 to 85), D Walford and  
T Williams

Also present: Councillor Karen Collett (Portfolio Holder for Community)  
Councillor Stephen Cavinder (council appointed  
representative to Watford Citizens Advice and Chair of the  
Neighbourhood Forum Task Group)  
Jim Rutledge, Shopmobility  
Marilyn Carvell, Shopmobility  
Salim Bakirci, Chief Officer Citizens Advice Watford

Officers: Corporate, Leisure and Community Client Section Head (for  
minute numbers 74 to 78)  
Contract Monitoring Officer (JF) (for minute numbers 74 to 78)  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

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

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the scrutiny committee that since the publication of the agenda Councillor Rindl had tendered her resignation. This meant that there was currently a vacancy on the committee.

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

There were no disclosures of interests.

### 76 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2017 were submitted and signed.

### 77 **Call-in**

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

## **Commissioning Framework: Shopmobility and Watford Citizens Advice**

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head stated that following on from the last meeting two further organisations had been invited to speak to the scrutiny committee about their role as a commissioned organisation. At this meeting representatives were present from Shopmobility and Citizens Advice Watford. In the new municipal year the scrutiny committee would receive the end of year statistics from all the commissioned organisations.

### **Shopmobility**

Jim Rutledge, informed the scrutiny committee about Shopmobility and the services it provided to visitors to Watford Town Centre. Over the last year there had been 10,980 visits to the service by 1,400 individuals. This showed that many visitors returned to use the service again. He provided a breakdown of the number and types of users. He referred to the volunteers who supported the service. The organisation made every effort to retain its volunteers and there was currently a waiting list of people wanting to help. The volunteers ranged in ages from 16 to over 80. The majority were retired. The volunteers had a wide range of skills. The organisation gave long service awards to their volunteers. Two of the volunteers had received an Audentior Award.

The scrutiny committee made a number of comments and posed several questions about funding and charging users for hiring the equipment.

The Corporate Leisure and Community Client Section Head commented that officers had held discussions with the organisation about differentiating between resident and non-resident users. It was estimated that the split was about 50%. It was recognised that people coming from outside the borough were spending their money in the town.

Jim Rutledge added that people coming from outside Watford were making a conscious decision to visit Watford and therefore bringing revenue into the town. An average visit usually comprised at least two people. The service had been provided for over 20 years and a conscious decision had been made not to charge for the loan of a manual or battery powered wheelchair. There was a daily charge of £2 for those people wishing to borrow a wheelchair on a long term. The organisation realised that in the future it may need to charge for all its services.

Jim Rutledge informed the scrutiny committee that the organisation had a Fundraising Manager. A variety of events were held to raise further funds for the organisation.

Marilyn Carvell stated that the council provided £36,000 in grant support. This was very much appreciated and not taken for granted. In the past the Harlequin used to provide some funding but this had stopped since it had become Intu. She had taken part in an accessibility tour of the town centre with the manager from the Business Improvement District (BID) and had helped to identify 'pinch points' in the town for wheelchair users. Instructions on how to donate to the organisation were available on the website. Following a councillor's suggestion about monthly direct debits, she said this was something they could think about for the future.

The scrutiny committee asked various questions about the ethnic mix of volunteers and how people became aware of the service.

Jim Rutledge and Marilyn Carvell said that they were grateful for any volunteers to come forward and were not selected on the individual's ethnicity. Jim Rutledge reiterated that the volunteers tended to stay with the organisation so there was very little capacity for additional people. He said that there were three people on the waiting list who wished to become a volunteer as a space became available. He said that he would be delighted to visit different groups to explain about the service provided by Shopmobility.

Marilyn Carvell informed the scrutiny committee that Watford Shopmobility was the biggest scheme in the area. It was the only one to be open seven days per week. It was felt that someone with a disability should be able to go shopping on the same days as everyone else.

Jim Rutledge added that it was recognised that the country had a growing older population and the service would likely need to expand. In addition with a 'larger' population the fleet need to be adjusted accordingly.

Councillor Collett, Portfolio Holder responsible for community, commented that Shopmobility did a wonderful job. She had a friend who had multiple sclerosis, who felt this service was a lifeline for her. She said that she had heard the comments about funding and would speak to the BID and ask if it could make a financial contribution to the organisation. It needed to be recognised that the service helped people to come into the town and whilst there spend their money in the shops and other businesses.

Jim Rutledge thanked the council for its continuing support.

The Chair thanked both Jim Rutledge and Marilyn Carvell for coming and speaking to the scrutiny committee about their work.

## **Citizens Advice Watford**

Salim Bakirci, the Chief Officer for Citizens Advice Watford gave a presentation to the scrutiny committee about the service in Watford. During his presentation he advised that like other organisations, the service was struggling with raising funds. The funds from the county council had been reducing. Any reduction affected the additional support the organisation could give its clients.

In response to questions from the scrutiny committee, Salim Bakirci advised that the organisation provided a breakdown of users' information to the council. This could be circulated after the meeting. He said that approximately 50% of clients were white British and the other 50% from ethnic minorities. The majority of clients were female.

With regard to the 'Watford Money-wise' project approximately 1,000 students had taken part in the project in the last year. There was a high demand for the project to be carried out in schools and colleges. The organisation worked hard to engage with the local schools. Even if there was a reduction in funding for this project it was hoped it could be continued by using volunteers to carry it out. It was considered important to train people as early as possible as it would be more costly if they got into debt. Students were encouraged to save. The service was promoted to ensure that people knew who to contact at an early stage.

Salim Bakirci informed the scrutiny committee that the organisation saw almost every client at a face to face meeting. In order to increase capacity the organisation tried to attract more volunteers. It was a demanding role and volunteers had to commit to one day per month for 18 months. The organisation worked hard to reach as many different groups as possible. The centre was one of a few in Hertfordshire which was open four days per week. Appointments were arranged for Fridays. A telephone service was available on Fridays. If the organisation had more funding it would enable the drop-in service to be open on Fridays, as paid staff needed to be onsite.

In response to questions about funding, Salim Bakirci explained that the organisation's funding had been cut over the last three years. It had reduced its costs by 40% and moved to a volunteer model. This was considered to be the most effective model of operation. The organisation was looking for other funding. It was not the type of organisation that attracted funding from individuals. However, even though there had been cuts in funding the organisation was managing to continue its service.

Following a question about language barriers, Salim Bakirci advised that many clients did not have English as their first language. Many of the organisation's

volunteers spoke languages used in the community. Translators were also used when required. The organisation tried to empower people and encouraged them to bring their own translators. However, it was recognised that some issues may not be appropriate for young children to act as the translator. The organisation tried to match clients with appropriate staff or volunteers. However there were occasions when it may not be appropriate for someone from the same community to attend the meeting. The organisation was not able to provide a translator for all the different languages used in Watford.

Councillor Dhindsa said that he recalled that a grant of £30,000 had been awarded to the Citizens Advice when the Muslim Project had lost its grant. This grant had been to fund a rights and advice post. He asked if information could be provided about this matter and if the post had been funded, how long this had been in place.

It was agreed that this information would be circulated to the scrutiny committee.

Salim Bakirci advised that outreach sessions had been in place but due to the low demand had been cut. Only the outreach session at the foodbank had been retained.

Councillor Collet commented that the Citizens Advice Watford received 76% of its funding from Watford Borough Council. It supported the vulnerable people in the town. It was important that this service received support. She praised the organisation's work.

Councillor Cavinder said that in the short time he had been the council's appointed representative to Citizens Advice, he had been impressed by the enthusiasm of the volunteers, who worked hard for Watford residents. He was proud to be a part of the work carried out by Citizens Advice Watford.

The Chair thanked Salim Bakirci for his presentation and taking time to respond to councillors' questions.

RESOLVED –

1. that a breakdown of the clients using the services of Citizens Advice Watford be circulated to the scrutiny committee.
2. that information about funding for a rights and advice officer at Citizens Advice Watford be circulated to the scrutiny committee.

79 **Quarter 3 2016/17: Key Performance Indicator report**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head which set out the results of the key performance indicators for the third quarter of 2016/17. It was noted that the results of the customer services performance indicators were circulated prior to the meeting.

The scrutiny committee was asked to email the Partnerships and Performance Section Head if there were any questions they wished to raise.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

80 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

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

The Chair informed the scrutiny committee that the last decision regarding the 'pilot modular building project' should have indicated that she had been informed that the decision was to be taken and not the Chairman of Watford Borough Council.

RESOLVED –

that the updated report be noted.

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

Councillor Hastrick provided the scrutiny committee with an update on the county's Health Scrutiny Committee. At the last meeting, the scrutiny committee had reviewed the various National Health Service budgets. A further meeting was due to be held on 30 March when the full report would be available. She would ensure that it was circulated to this scrutiny committee.

82 **Neighbourhood Forum Task Group - Cabinet response**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Officer including the minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 March 2017 and the revised protocol and guidelines.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reported that Cabinet had reviewed the task group's recommendations, which had been amended by the small working group led by the Mayor.

Following Councillor Dhindsa's question about his enquiry at the last meeting, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she had contacted the Head of Democracy and Governance the following day. It had been noted that Neighbourhood Forums were an executive function and the task group had comprised councillors from the current political groups on the council.

Following a question about the recommendation that had proposed transferring any remaining funds to the Chairman's charities, Councillor Cavinder, chair of the task group and member of the working group, explained that it had not been agreed as it had been suggested that councillors may be able to carry funding over to the following year.

RESOLVED –

that Cabinet's comments and decisions be noted.

**83 Budget Panel**

No update had been provided by the Chair of Budget Panel. The minutes were available on the council's website.

**84 Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel**

The Chair of Outsourced Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Williams, reported that at the last meeting the panel had received the latest performance information and a presentation from Human Resources on its work.

**85 Community Safety Partnership Task Group**

The Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, Councillor Martins, informed the scrutiny committee that the task group had reviewed its working arrangements as it had become too operational and needed to look at the strategic level. Three themes had been chosen for the 2017/18 work programme. He was still proposing a change of name for the task group and would ensure a report was presented at the next available Constitution Working Party.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer added that the task group had reviewed terms of reference and these would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny

Committee at its meeting in June. At that meeting the scrutiny committee would be appointing membership of the task group and chair.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.45 pm