

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 July 2019

- Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, R Martins, B Mauthoor,
M Parker, G Saffery, R Smith and J Stiff
- Also present: Steve Devine, Watford New Hope (for minute numbers 10 to 16)
Councillor K Collett, Portfolio Holder, (for minute numbers 10 to 17),
Councillor S Johnson, Portfolio Holder responsible for Housing, (for minute numbers 10 to 17)
Councillor Mark Watkin, Portfolio Holder responsible for resources, (for minute numbers 10 to 15)
- Officers: Group Head of Transformation (for minute numbers 10 to 15)
Watford 2020 Programme Manager (for minute numbers 10 to 15)
Head of Housing (for minute numbers 10 to 16)
Housing Supply Manager (for minute numbers 10 to 16)
Senior Democratic Services Officer

10 Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Smith replaced Councillor Turmaine.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dhindsa.

11 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

12 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2019 were submitted and signed.

13 Other scrutiny meetings - minutes

The scrutiny committee noted the other scrutiny committees and task groups that had taken place since its last meeting.

14

Call-in

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

15

Watford 2020 Update

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Watford 2020 Programme Manager which provided an update on the latest position of the corporate transformation programme.

The Watford 2020 Programme Manager and Group Head of Transformation gave a presentation explaining the background to the Watford 2020 Programme and the accompanying report. The Group Head of Transformation explained about each of the enabling projects and the current position, including –

- Customer Management System Replacement
- Front Office
- Personal IT
- Wider Area Network (WAN)
- Unified Communications
- Business Support
- Business Intelligence

The Watford 2020 Programme Manager provided an update on the following service-led projects –

- Development Management / Planning Policy
- Community and Environmental
- Community Protection
- Revenues and Benefits
- Corporate Asset Management
- Communications
- Transport and Infrastructure
- Print and Post
- Legal
- Human Resources

At future meetings councillors would be provided with updates on the progress of these areas.

In response to a question about involving external organisations who worked with the council, the Watford 2020 Programme Manager confirmed that as part

of the workshops external agencies were considered where necessary. The team was aware that there were various outside organisations that interacted with the council.

The Watford 2020 Programme Manager stated that the team were mindful of GDPR. A Data Protection Impact Assessment had been carried out and any GDPR implications were reviewed. It was part of the design process.

Following a question about the 'RAG' status and those in red, the Watford 2020 Programme Manager advised that a monthly report was presented to the Watford 2020 Programme Board, chaired by the Managing Director. This report provided details of each project. Officers considered whether there was anything that could be put in place to ensure the project met its deadlines or the board could be asked for an extension with relevant explanations for the request.

A question was asked about complaints and the ability to provide feedback. The Watford 2020 Programme Manager confirmed that one of the first things to go live was the compliments, comments and complaints form. It was also possible to provide feedback through the member and staff portals.

The Group Head of Transformation responded to a question about tender decisions and whether officers involved in those processes and decisions represented areas from across the council. He explained that the decision process depended on the contract and which officers were appropriate for each procurement exercise, but officers from different service areas were involved.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Watkin, thanked the programme team for the presentation. He suggested it may be useful to give councillors a demonstration at the next meeting. He suggested the process of transformation looked impersonal. However, officers were fully involved and did any related work in addition to their normal work. It was important to understand the pressure officers were under. He commented that it would take time for the processes to bed in. He asked councillors to provide any feedback they received or had about the process.

In response to a question about job losses, the Group Head of Transformation confirmed that there had been some and there were likely to be a few more. Part of the driver for the programme was to save £1 million. When any jobs were at risk the council worked with officers to try and redeploy them to other positions. Senior officers had carefully considered how the loss of jobs could be minimised. As an example, he explained how vacant posts in the Customer Services' team were filled with fixed term-contracts or contractors on short-term contracts.

The chair thanked the officers for their presentation and looked forward to seeing them again on 24 October.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Watford 2020 update be noted.
2. that at the meeting on 24 October 2019 officers provide a demonstration of one or two online forms.

16

What's happening about rough sleeping in Watford?

The Head of Housing and Housing Strategy Officer gave a presentation about rough sleeper numbers in Watford and how the housing service was trying to resolve the issue with its partners. They were accompanied by Steve Devine, the Rough Sleepers Prevention Services Manager from New Hope.

The presentation included a comparison of the rough sleeper count in Watford over the last five years and how this compared with the other Hertfordshire local authorities. It was noted that the actual number of rough sleepers was usually three or four times higher than the count. This was due to the strict rules that applied to the count. Even those known to be rough sleepers could not be counted unless they were asleep or just about to settle down for the night. The actual number of known and verified rough sleepers in November 2018 was 46.

The Housing Strategy Officer explained about the funding that had been acquired from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and how it had been used to support the rough sleeper service work. The council also provided some funding that went towards the outreach work. She referred to the winter night shelter that had provided accommodation for over 100 users during the coldest nights of the winter.

The Housing Strategy Officer then informed the scrutiny committee about the 'Complex Needs Housing Project' and the 'Rough Sleeper Pathway'. The council had published best practice guidelines for those people and organisations who wanted to work with rough sleepers.

Steve Devine was invited to speak about New Hope and its services in Watford. He informed the scrutiny committee about the helpline, the Outreach and Intervention Team services and Rough Sleeping Prevention Service (RSPS) at Haven Support Centre, the Sanctuary and the emergency and winter night shelters. The RSPS was able to signpost people to appropriate organisations to help with their needs. It was possible for New Hope to get information through

StreetLink, which was a mobile app enabling people to report a rough sleeper, who could then be helped by local organisations, including New Hope. He emphasised to the councillors that not all people begging were rough sleepers. Rough sleepers did not require any funds to be able to stay in a night shelter initially, as this could be covered by New Hope. He also mentioned the Sanctuary which provided assessment and emergency beds. Finally, he referred to SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Plan) which was available when the temperature dropped to 0 degrees and below.

The Head of Housing informed the scrutiny committee that the funding was disproportionate for the size of the town. This was a national problem and not just in Watford. Previously the service had been reactionary but with the extra funding it now allowed the council and its partners to be proactive. He asked Steve Devine to explain how the temperature was not only a problem when it was cold.

Steve Devine stated that New Hope had given out a lot of bottles of water during the current hot period. A new appeal had gone out on social media for sun block to be donated to the organisation so that it could distribute it to rough sleepers. He needed to discuss with officers the potential of needing to open SWEP during these next few days. There was a leeway within the strategy as it referred to extreme weather, for example heavy rain fall would also be covered. The rough sleepers in Watford mainly had a connection to the town. If someone was found to be from outside the area they would be encouraged to go back to their original home town, as they would be able to get more support. However, no one was rejected if they did not have a Watford connection.

Steve Devine informed the scrutiny committee that New Hope tried to interact with rough sleepers as soon as they became aware of them. All the accommodation available, beside the Sanctuary, was 'dry' and often the person needed to have been dry for 30 days. At the recovery house people have to be prepared to go into recovery. However some people did not want this. The service tried but was very much dependent on space.

In response to a question about the number of spaces available, Steve Devine said there were approximately 60 places across the different accommodation. The Head of Housing added that there were further places available at the GROW and YMCA. Some people approached the council for housing assistance. The pressure was in getting individuals through the different stages to where they could be more independent. The Move on project could potentially provide 45 extra places. Following a question, he advised that until the funding had been secured for the project, sites had not been identified. Once the funding was available officers would work with a housing association to acquire the property.

In response to a question about future funding, the Head of Housing said that if the funding from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government was not available, as previously, and it would be very difficult. The possibility had been discussed with the various partners. He referred to comments by Theresa May, when as Prime Minister had given the commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and eradicate it by 2027. He felt this would be a big challenge. He was aware that funding availability could not be announced until the new Prime Minister was in post and Brexit had been resolved.

Following a question about the 'Move on' plans, Steve Devine explained that if someone went straight into temporary accommodation there would little or no support. New Hope tried to work with as many individuals as possible and was able to provide support as they moved into normal tenancies. The Housing Strategy Officer added that as those with complex needs moved through the types of accommodation, the available support became less as they were able to control their own lives and stop them going back. The Head of Housing commented that New Hope was able to gather information about the individuals which enabled the partners to help these people.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Johnson, said that he was proud of the work carried out by Watford Borough Council. The complex needs unit would provide for 18 adults which had not been available previously. He reminded councillors that this was actually the County Council's responsibility, but Watford Borough Council did the work as it was 'the right thing to do'. The number of people within temporary accommodation had significantly reduced due to the work carried out by the council's Housing Property team. This had given the council the opportunity to look at the complex needs unit.

A question was raised about New Hope and how it advertised its services. Steve Devine responded that literature was circulated as widely as possible. There were posters within the town. Following a question about food, he advised that New Hope received help from Costco, local churches and faith groups. A vending machine company provided items that could not be placed in their machines due to time limits but were still in date. New Hope received frozen chickens from Nandos, which enabled them to create evening meals for people. He said that following a request about approaching KPMG, he had forwarded the information to the Finance and Communications team. Watford was a generous town.

The Chair thanked the council's Housing team, the Portfolio Holder and New Hope for their tireless work.

- 17 **Statutory Guidance on Overview and Scrutiny in Local and Combined Authorities**
- The scrutiny committee received a report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer which provided a brief overview of the recently published statutory guidance on scrutiny.
- The Senior Democratic Services Officer highlighted some of the key elements of the report, particularly those that were relevant to the scrutiny committee.
- RESOLVED –
- that the report be noted.
- 18 **Executive Decision Progress Report**
- The scrutiny committee received the 2019/20 Executive Decision Progress Report. The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that an additional notice had been published since the report. Details of the Group Head of Service Transformation's decision was available online.
- RESOLVED –
- that the 2019/20 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.
- 19 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**
- Councillor Grimston informed the scrutiny committee that she had attended her first meeting of Health Scrutiny Committee which was held on for Thursday 11 July at County Hall. It appeared that it would be a busy year. There had been some hotly debated discussions at the meeting. The minutes were available on the county council's website.
- 20 **New scrutiny task group - Watford Colosseum**
- The scrutiny committee received a report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer setting out a new scrutiny proposal for a task group. It was noted that the report included the names of three councillors who were interested in taking part in the task group but none had offered to chair it.
- Following a discussion, Councillors Grimston and Parker stated they were interested in being part of the new task group. Councillor Smith said that he was happy to be considered as chair, which the scrutiny committee agreed.

RESOLVED –

1. that a new task group be established to review the feedback about Watford Colosseum.
2. that the Watford Colosseum Task Group comprises Councillors Crout, Grimston, Martins, Parker and Smith
3. that Councillor Smith be appointed Chair of the Watford Colosseum Task Group.

21

Work Programme

The scrutiny committee received the updated draft of its work programme, incorporating the suggestions from the previous meetings.

Councillors discussed scrutinising the Community Safety Partnership and asking the Police to attend the meeting. The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised the scrutiny committee that it was a statutory requirement to hold one meeting to scrutinise the Community Safety Partnership. She acknowledged that previous timetables had allocated several meetings to the Community Safety Partnership Task Group.

There were options available to councillors if they had a valid community safety topic to scrutinise, including one off meetings to scrutinise a specific aspect of the partnership. However, the meeting should not be about getting information without an identified outcome or recommendation. The Senior Democratic Services Officer reminded the scrutiny committee that the Community Safety Partnership comprised a number of organisations, including the Police, Watford Borough Council, Hertfordshire County Council and many others.

Following further discussion, it was agreed that an all member briefing be arranged to explain about the Community Safety Partnership and providing answers to the following questions –

- What is it?
- Who is involved?
- What are its aims, objectives and plan?
- How can the council help?

The Senior Democratic Services Officer added that once the councillors had received the presentation they may identify areas that needed further scrutiny.

This could be discussed at a future meeting for inclusion in the work programme or as a separate meeting in December, January or February.

The chair suggested that at the meeting on 27 February the scrutiny committee could discuss how scrutiny had worked this year and if there were any suggestions that could be taken forward in the future.

RESOLVED –

1. that an all member briefing be arranged to explain about the Community Safety Partnership and its role.
2. that the work programme be updated as discussed.

22

Dates of Next Meetings

- Thursday 26 September 2019
- Thursday 24 October 2019
- Thursday 28 November 2019

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.30 pm