

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 September 2019

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)  
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, K Crout, R Martins, B Mauthoor,  
J Pattinson and M Turmaine

Also present: Ben Johnson (Watford Community Housing)

Officers: Head of Leisure and Environmental Services  
Commissioning Officer (Leisure and Community Team)  
Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Pattinson replaced Councillor Saffery and Councillor Crout replaced Councillor Stiff.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Parker.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 25 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2019 were submitted and signed.

### 26 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

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

### 27 **Call-in**

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

## **Watford Community Housing Task Group - Recommendations update**

The scrutiny committee received a report setting out the Watford Community Housing Task Group's recommendations and the response from Watford Community Housing (WCH). Ben Johnson, Group Director of Operations at the organisation attended the meeting to explain the responses and the progress that had been made.

### **Service Charges**

The scrutiny committee agreed that a further update should be provided on the first recommendation at a future meeting. Following a question about testing communications with residents, Mr Johnson advised that several avenues were used to review information. This included the Gateway team, local residents' associations and the Group Board, which included residents.

In response to a question about compensation, which was referred to in the update for the second recommendation, Mr Johnson confirmed that WCH had a compensation policy that set out the details.

### **Maintenance**

Mr Johnson informed members that he had met the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services to discuss WCH and the council working together to improve local amenities. A further meeting would be held to discuss specific areas of concern. It was agreed that a further update would be presented at a future meeting.

The scrutiny committee commented on void properties. Mr Johnson referred to the recent update and that the Planned Investment Programme was available on the website. It was noted that the programme did not specify the month the work would be carried out. Mr Johnson explained that specific dates could only be included for the current year. Residents would be contacted nearer the time the works were due to start.

Members noted this recommendation referenced voids. The chair asked whether the voids process was getting quicker. Mr Johnson responded that there had been an issue with the speed of ensuring void properties were ready to let. This had been due to resourcing problems. This had been resolved and the turnaround which had been running at 40 working days was slowly reducing. The performance target was 19 working days, which the organisation was working towards. There was some concern from councillors that residents were not being given clear indications of when a void property would be ready for occupation. Mr Johnson acknowledged that there had been some issues with

communications to residents but this had improved since processes had been changed. He advised that the length of time required for works to get a property to let would depend on the amount of work required at the property. He informed members that the works were carried out by an in-house team which was managed by the team leader, whilst a planner scheduled the works. Recently some works had been contracted out to the companies that carried out some of the planned work. There had been staffing issues but the vacant posts had now been filled. The scrutiny committee agreed to review this recommendation at a future meeting.

## **Repairs**

The scrutiny committee noted the response to the recommendation about the completion of repairs. It was agreed to review this recommendation at a future meeting to allow the current review to be completed and changes implemented.

The chair noted the following task group recommendation referred to electronic surveys. She asked how older residents and those who did not use computers would be able to provide feedback. It was also asked about those people who did not have English as their first language. Mr Johnson responded that there would still be an option to complete a paper survey; residents would be able to make that choice. In response to languages, he explained that WCH was aware of those residents who did not use English as their first language. Translation facilities were available and 'Google Translate' could be used. However, there were not many tenants this affected. It was agreed that this recommendation would be updated at a future meeting following the expected implementation by April 2020.

The scrutiny committee agreed the following two task group recommendations were satisfactory.

There was some concern about the response to the final recommendation in this section. Members felt the organisation should change the ratio of compliments and complaints. They felt that a 50/50 balance was wrong and there should be a far greater percentage of compliments than complaints. Mr Johnson said that WCH would prefer 9 out of 10 residents to be satisfied, which was the repairs satisfaction target, 90%. This was being achieved. Residents were more likely to put in a complaint than a compliment. However WCH received some very good compliments and felt the ratio was challenging and appropriate. The ratio was set by the Board and was unlikely to be changed. It was suggested that councillors could write to the Chief Executive with their views, which could be presented to the Board. Members were also reminded that the council appointed a person to WCH's Board; this year it was Stephen Cavinder, members could approach him about the statistic. A further suggestion was that the chair

could speak to the housing Portfolio Holder. Members agreed that they wished to get a further update at a future meeting.

### **Customer Service**

Mr Johnson referred the scrutiny committee to the final recommendation. The new module was currently undergoing testing and it was hoped it would be rolled out to operational staff shortly after the completion of the test. He confirmed the module was compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation. The scrutiny committee agreed to review this again at a future meeting.

RESOLVED –

1. that the outstanding recommendations be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2020.

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### **Small Grants Fund Review Year 3 2018-19 and period 2016-19**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services which provided an overview of the Small Grants Fund covering the period from April 2016 to March 2019.

The Commissioning Officer highlighted some of the results from the survey and future arrangements. She advised that the maximum application had increased from £2,000 to £3,000, although the overall budget remained the same. From April 2020, applicants would be required to provide 10% cash match funding of the overall cost of the project. In addition organisations would only be able to apply once and then not apply again for another two years.

In response to a question about the types of organisations making an application, the Commissioning Officer advised that she attended various events to publicise the fund; these had included at Watford and Three Rivers Trust, the Pump House and Watford Football Club. Watford and Three Rivers Trust had been asked to publicise the fund. The council advertised the fund through social media. Councillors were asked to inform officers of any organisations which might benefit from the Mayor's Small Grant Fund.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services added that following last year's presentation to the scrutiny committee, councillors were provided with application packs. Two years ago it had been agreed to notify ward councillors when applications were received. It was an open application process. If an applicant did not meet the council's criteria they would be signposted to other help, e.g. Watford and Three Rivers Trust.

The Commissioning Officer added that when signposted to Watford and Three Rivers Trust, the organisation would advise and support applicants. She confirmed that 'local' was defined as providing the service or event to Watford residents; although the organisation may be based outside of Watford the beneficiaries should be from Watford. They were asked for a percentage of Watford recipients and their funding might be assessed proportionately.

The Commissioning Officer reported that each organisation receiving funding had to complete an outcomes and achievement report. This included how the funding had been spent and receipts had to be submitted. She added that she tried to visit projects and events when they took place. She also encouraged organisations to invite the Mayor which enabled him to see the event. Small deviations from the details on the application form were allowed, for example if the group had been able to purchase something cheaper than originally expected. The applicant may ask if they could use the remainder of the funding for some different equipment. If it was for a different project she would ask for more details. All applicants were advised that the funds should be used for the application project.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services informed the scrutiny committee that the fund was regularly audited, as it was using public money. The council would not transfer funds to an individual's bank account. If the group did not have a group account then they would be advised to go through Watford and Three Rivers Trust.

Following a number of questions about the funding criteria, the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services explained that the new criteria had just been agreed by the management team. Applicants had complained that £2,000 was too small. Next year would be the first year that match-funding had been required. Officers did not want to dissuade non-constituted groups, which was the reason for asking Watford and Three Rivers Trust to provide the additional support.

The Commissioning Officer added that due to the close working relationship with Watford and Three Rivers Trust, she was able to find out how organisations signposted there were progressing. Following a questions about the deadline, she advised that the January deadline allowed for the final decision-making meeting in February and ensured all financial work was completed before the close of the council's accounts. It then allowed officers to prepare the application forms for the new financial year.

Councillors welcomed the inclusion of applications from sports clubs. The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services informed the scrutiny committee that as from April 2020 the funding would be split into three sections. £30,000 would be

available for general applications, £10,000 for sports clubs and £10,000 for green projects. The information would be publicised before 1 April 2020.

The chair thanked the officers for the presentation and responding to officers questions.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

## 30 **End of Quarter 1 2019 /20 Key Performance Indicator Results**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications setting out the key performance indicator results for the first quarter of 2019/20.

The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications highlighted some of the key findings from this quarter's report.

### **Leisure Centres**

It was noted that although the leisure centres were doing well, increasing swimming attendances was a challenge. The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications felt a possible reason may be due to the number of sports activities that were available.

### **Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing**

Members were concerned about the increase in fly posting. The scrutiny committee was advised that Veolia would be attending a meeting later in the year and this would be raised with the officers.

### **Staff Indicators**

The scrutiny committee was informed that one member of staff on long term sickness absence could have a significant impact on the indicator. Also the most difficult period from sickness was approaching. Reference was made to 'flu jabs' and officers agreed to check whether this facility would be offered to staff this year as it had previously.

The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications referred to the below target response for the performance development reviews (PDRs). This was in part due to a senior officer being off sick at an essential stage in the review process but 100% was achieved soon after the 30 June.

Councillor Martins asked if it was possible to understand reasons for sickness and whether they were for physical illness or mental health conditions. He would like officers to provide an explanatory note in the comments section. This was an important issue for him as the council's mental health champion. Officers needed to be able to say if they were off sick for mental health reasons.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that she was aware the different reasons for sickness absence were collated, as it used to be circulated to senior officers. The Senior Democratic Services Officer and Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications would find out for councillors and if an explanatory comment could be provided it would be shown in the next quarter's report.

### **ICT Service**

The Group Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications advised the scrutiny committee that the Group Head of Transformation was reviewing the ICT targets to make them more relevant.

RESOLVED –

that the key performance indicators be noted.

### **31 Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee received the 2019/20 Executive Decision Progress Report.

### **32 Work Programme**

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

Following a question about the market, the Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that a recent report had been presented to Cabinet. The decision was available on the council's website. Members considered this subject for inclusion in the scrutiny committee's work programme for 27 February 2020.

RESOLVED –

that the work programme be updated as discussed during the meeting.

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**Dates of Next Meetings**

- Thursday 24 October 2019
- Thursday 28 November 2019
- Thursday 19 December 2019

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 9.00 pm