

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 June 2020

Present: Councillor M Parker (Chair)  
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors D Allen-Williamson, K Crout, P Jeffree, R Martins,  
B Mauthoor, G Saffery and M Turmaine

Officers: Community Safety Co-ordinator  
Environmental Health Officer  
Senior Democratic Services Officer  
Democratic Services Manager

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

The Chair welcomed everyone to the authority's first virtual Overview and Scrutiny Committee. She introduced the councillors and officers present and advised members that they would be asked how they wished to vote at the end of each agenda item. Advice was also given about the procedures to be followed should the internet live stream stop during the meeting.

There were no apologies for absence.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 3 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2020 were submitted. It was noted that the minutes would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

### 4 **Call-in**

No executive decisions had been called in.

### 5 **Community Safety Partnership**

The Community Safety Co-ordinator gave a presentation which reviewed the 2019/20 community safety priorities and considered the focus for 2020/21. An

update was also provided on issues which had arisen during the Covid-19 lockdown period. It was noted that this item had been on the agenda for the previous meeting on 19 March, but this meeting had been cancelled due to the coronavirus. A copy of the presentation had been circulated to scrutiny members with the agenda.

Updating his presentation to take into account the effects of Covid-19, the Community Safety Co-ordinator raised the following points:

- Covid19 had significantly impacted the priorities identified for 2020-21 i.e., serious youth violence, management of the rough sleeper cohort and theft from vehicles. Lockdown restrictions had meant that rates of youth violence and theft from vehicles had fallen away, however the management of the rough sleeper cohort had taken on a new urgency as work had been undertaken to accommodate Watford's homeless population.
- Watford had been unable to house any asylum seekers during lockdown. Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) had taken a number of people, who would subsequently be returned to London.
- Regular meetings and exchanges of information had been taking place with key stakeholders to ensure strategic consideration of all community safety issues. Levels of domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour (a footprint for more serious crime), race hate and neighbourhood disputes had been closely monitored as well as other indicators of societal strain e.g., excessive bonfires and fly-tipping.
- Crime levels:
  - Around 26 crimes per day would normally be investigated, this had fallen to between 15-19 crimes per day during lockdown.
  - Anti-social behaviour was down 5.5% since April or 80% down on this time last year, largely due to the absence of the night time economy and the fact that people were not out on the streets. Watford residents had largely abided by the lockdown restrictions. Elsewhere in the county, higher levels of antisocial behaviour had been reported.
  - Race hate crimes had mainly arisen in shops where people were required to queue but did not want to socially distance. Some shop lifting had also been reported linked to rough sleepers.
  - Neighbourhood disputes had halved.
  - Domestic abuse reporting was beginning to increase as lockdown restrictions eased. There had been a recent spike in non-crime figures i.e., requests for police assistance, but no desire for formal action to be taken. These were mainly inter-familial disputes. The importance of the work carried out by Watford Womens Centre was underlined.
  - Large numbers of youths were now congregating in parks across the county with associated drugs and disorder offences on the rise. Within

Watford there had been an increase in complaints relating to anti-social behaviour in Cassiobury Park.

Following the Community Safety Coordinator's report, the committee discussed:

- **Long term strategy for rough sleepers in the town.** It was reported that there were around 70 rough sleepers in the borough. During lockdown, these had mostly been accommodated in the Travelodge hotel. The council's housing team considered that those who had been able to maintain their tenancy should be given an opportunity to access properties to remove them permanently from the streets. There remained a number of individuals who would not take advantage of this opportunity. For these, a more aggressive enforcement stance was likely in the future.
- **Race cases following the Black Lives Matter march.** Policing at the march on 6 June had been considered successful with a good rapport between police and the organisers. A number of people had contacted the police following Anthony Joshua's speech which they felt incited racism. The police had not upheld the complaints. Some dissatisfaction had arisen as a consequence and some complaints were being taken further.
- **Need to publicise work taken to counter anti-social behaviour in Cassiobury Park.** The committee considered that the council should publicise measures taken by the police e.g., any arrests or convictions, to demonstrate the unacceptability of anti-social behaviour and drug taking in the town. It should also highlight the on-going action being taken by police to tackle crime in our parks and open spaces. Members also suggested that the park rangers could assist the police by taking a greater enforcement role in the future.
- **Biggest challenge for community safety next year.** The Community Safety Coordinator considered that youth knife crime was a significant area of concern which related to drug use.

The Chair thanked the Community Safety Coordinator for his detailed presentation.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

## 6 **Health Services for the Deaf Task Group - final report**

The scrutiny committee received the final report of the Health Services for the Deaf Task Group. This item had also been on the agenda of the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee, cancelled due to the coronavirus. Councillor

Saffery, the task group's Chair, explained the work carried out by the task group and how councillors had reached their recommendations.

Members welcomed the task group's final report which had observed the concerns of the deaf community well and drawn out a useful set of conclusions and recommendations. The Chair underlined her commitment, as the council's representative, to ensuring that these would be taken up fully by Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mauthoor regretted that there had been no Labour representation on the task group. She questioned whether any particular impacts had been found on the BAME community. Councillor Saffery advised that this had not become apparent during the task group's work, but that a focus on the BAME community should be a strand of investigation by the county council when it carried out its work.

There followed a discussion about the task group's final recommendation: "WHHT should consider adding 'welcome' in a written representation of BSL to the signage outside the main entrance to Watford General Hospital." It was agreed that the wording should be strengthened; the local hospital was located within the borough and should set an example in its recognition of the deaf community.

The chair thanked everyone who had been involved in the task group and Councillor Saffery for chairing discussions.

RESOLVED –

that the final report and recommendations of the Health Services for the Deaf Task Group be agreed and forwarded to Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, subject to strengthening recommendation 10.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

## 7 **Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee**

Councillor Parker advised that recent meetings of Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee had been cancelled. The next meeting was due to take place on 16 July and she would provide an update on discussions to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on 23 July.

## 8 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the final edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report for 2019-20 and consider whether any further information was required.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that the Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse policies would now be going to Cabinet in September.

Councillor Dhindsa asked for some further information about the Watford Market Management Contract decision from September 2019.

RESOLVED –

that the final 2019/20 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

9

### **Work Programme**

The scrutiny committee received the draft 2020/21 work programme. The chair emphasised the importance of devising the best approach to scrutinising the council's response to Covid-19. This might entail a number of different work streams, including individual task and finish groups to look at specific issues in more depth.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that the work programme provided an outline of suggested areas for scrutiny, but it was for members to direct its focus and establish what outcomes they wished to achieve. There was considerable flexibility and issues could be added or removed as required.

During discussions, committee members made the following comments regarding the scrutiny of the council's response to Covid-19:

- The council's response should be considered in the light of a possible second wave or the emergence of another pandemic.
- The town's response could be used as an exemplar by other authorities.
- Recovery plans for the town were crucial, but needed to be sufficiently robust to keep residents safe and enable businesses to thrive.
- The role of Watford and Three Rivers Trust should be reviewed.
- Specific consideration should be given to BAME issues.

In addition to reviewing the council's response to Covid-19, it was commented that Overview and Scrutiny Committee should continue to provide effective scrutiny of the council's outsourced services, including the Leisure Centre Management Contract (SLM/EA).

RESOLVED –

that the chair work with officers to incorporate members' suggestions for the 2020/21 work programme and devise an approach to scrutinising the council's response to Covid-19.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

10 **Dates of Next Meetings**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 23 July.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.50 pm