

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 July 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

Also present: Councillor Tim Williams

Officers: Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Group Head of Transformation
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services
Head of Programme Management Office
Senior Democratic Services Officer

The Chair welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, introducing the councillors and officers present.

11 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There were no apologies for absence.

12 **Disclosure of interests (if any)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

13 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020 were submitted. It was noted that the minutes would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

14 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

It was noted that Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 29 June. Minutes of the meeting were available on the council's website.

15 **Call-in**

No executive decisions had been called in.

Covid-19 - Our Road to Renewal

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Managing Director and Head of Programme Management Office. This set out the plan to lead the renewal of the town and council following the impact of Covid-19 and was one of a package of strategies, which included the Council Plan, Delivery Plan and Organisational Development Strategy.

The Head of Programme Management Office introduced the report using a short presentation which summarised the key issues around the Renewal Plan's governance and work streams. The presentation was circulated to members after the meeting.

During discussions, committee members highlighted a number of issues:

- the council's long term strategy to tackle homelessness in Watford, including access to central government funding to help deliver the authority's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- plans to develop the council's on-going relationship with the voluntary and community sector which would use specialists in the sector to build on the work the council had undertaken during Covid-19
- how the proposed reflective space in the Peace Garden was to be funded
- the need to ensure the survival of Watford's cultural venues
- the suggestion that a memorial to mark the pandemic might include a plaque near to Watford General Hospital listing the names of those who had lost their lives serving others in the front line
- what steps were being taken to ease the difficulties of retailers in the town e.g., rent and rates relief, and whether information on businesses which were in difficulties and/or not planning to reopen was available
- whether the council had longer term plans to assist businesses in difficulties with their rates payments
- the council's relationship with the local Chamber of Commerce, which remained strong along with partnerships with WENTA, the Federation of Small Businesses and the Business Improvement District
- future plans to allow councillors to access the Town Hall and any specific arrangements which would be required e.g., wearing of face masks
- arrangements around enabling staff to resume working at the Town Hall, including any risk assessments undertaken, the measures taken to mitigate any risks identified and whether union representatives had been consulted
- the demand from the public for face to face meetings with officers
- staff sickness levels during lockdown, noting that these had fallen, health and wellbeing arrangements and the possibility of providing Covid-19 antibody tests for officers.

The Group Head of Transformation agreed to provide a copy of the risk assessments used for staff and to determine whether union representatives had been consulted.

The Chair acknowledged the enormous work which had gone into preparing the council's Road to Renewal Plan, which she believed would greatly benefit both residents and businesses in the town.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Notes the report and Road to Renewal Plan
- Provides comments and feedback on the Road to Renewal Plan
- Approves the quarterly reporting of the plan and its progress to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Action: Group Head of Transformation

17

End of year 2019/20 Key Performance Indicator results

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications setting out the results for the council's key performance indicators as at the end of 2019/20.

The Executive Head of Strategy and Communications presented the report, highlighting some of the trends in performance across the council's services. Although the effects of Covid-19 were only just emerging at the end of quarter 4, these had anyway impacted performance. A small amount of data remained outstanding. It was anticipated that quarter 1 data for 2020/21 would reflect the impacts of Covid-19 more fully.

The Chair questioned the likely working arrangements for council staff in the future. In response, the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications commented that staff were appreciative of the flexibility and agility afforded by working from home. The needs of customers and residents remained paramount however, and a blend of home working and face to face contact was anticipated.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the key performance indicator results for 2019/20.

18 **Mayor's Small Grants Fund - 2019-20**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services. This set out expenditure by the Mayor's Small Grants Fund in 2019-20. Supporting information was included in a series of appendices to the main report.

Discussions of the 2019-20 expenditure were taken with the following item and are summarised below.

RESOLVED –

that the report and supporting information be reviewed and any recommendations passed to Cabinet.

19 **Mayor's Small Grants Fund 2020-21**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services. This set out expenditure by the Mayor's Small Grants Fund in 2020-21. Additional information had been provided in several appendices to the main report.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services advised that amendments had been made to the Mayor's Small Grants Fund application criteria to enable it to become a Coronavirus Emergency Support Fund. The fund had opened for applications earlier than previously, on 27 March, closing on 29 April when all funds had been allocated. 30 groups had received grants. Full details were included in the appendices to the report, including the location of recipients within the borough.

Considering the expenditure in 2019-20 and 2020-21, the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services was asked about the allocation of funds to groups supporting the borough's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, specifically:

- how much funding was allocated to BAME groups
- how many applications from BAME groups had been successful/unsuccessful
- where the facilities were located (since these were sometimes town, rather than ward, based)
- what actions had been taken to promote the funds to BAME groups and how, if required, this might be improved in the future.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services agreed to provide a full breakdown of the data for 2019-20 and 2020-21 as requested for the scrutiny committee.

RESOLVED –

that the report and supporting information be reviewed and any recommendations passed to Cabinet.

Action: Head of Leisure and Environmental Services

20

New scrutiny task group - WBC's relationship with W3RT during the COVID 19 pandemic

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer. This provided details of a potential scrutiny review about Watford Borough Council's relationship with the Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) during the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposal had arisen from discussions at the last meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 June.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer asked the committee to consider the scrutiny suggestion and if approved agree the membership and chair from amongst the nominations received. Since publication of the agenda there had been two developments:

- Councillor Pattinson had withdrawn her expression of interest to chair the task group
- Councillor Dhindsa had put his name forward to participate.

It was noted that the Senior Democratic Services Officer would work with the newly appointed task group chair to establish a schedule of meetings with the various stakeholders. The task group's final report and recommendations would be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 October 2020 before being submitted to Cabinet for consideration at the beginning of November.

The scrutiny committee was further advised that proposals on a second task group addressing issues around Watford's BAME communities would be put to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting on 24 September.

RESOLVED –

- that a new task group be established to review Watford Borough Council's relationship with the Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) during the Covid-19 pandemic

- that the Watford Borough Council's Relationship with the Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) during the Covid-19 Pandemic Task Group comprises Councillors Allen-Williamson, Dhindsa, Grimston, Pattinson, Saffery
- that Councillor Saffery be appointed Chair of the Task Group.

21 Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Parker advised that she had attended a meeting at Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on 16 July. She had circulated some information about the discussions to committee members.

Councillor Saffery thanked Councillor Parker for following up Watford Borough Council's report and recommendations from the Health Services for the Deaf Task Group with the Chairman of HCC's Health Scrutiny Committee. A very positive response had since been received from the County Councillor.

22 Executive Decision Progress Report

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2020-21 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2021/21 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

23 Work Programme

The scrutiny committee received the 2020/21 work programme. It was noted that this would need to incorporate quarterly reviews of progress on the council's Road to Renewal strategy. The first report would be considered in October.

RESOLVED –

that the proposed changes to the 2020/21 work programme be incorporated.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

24 Dates of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meetings would take place on Thursday 24 September and Thursday 22 October.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 9.20 pm