

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 November 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 (Portfolio Holder for Client Services)
Gary Foley – SLM, Contract Manager Watford Central and
Woodside
Kelly Spencer – SLM, General Manager Woodside
Karl Miles – SLM, Area Contract Manager

Officers: Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Group Head of Transformation
Business Transformation Project Manager
Contract & Partnership Manager – Leisure & Community
Services
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services
Executive Head of Human Resources
Head of Programme Management Office
Sports Development Officer

47 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

No apologies had been received.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

49 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2020 were agreed. It was noted that these would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

50 **Other scrutiny meetings**

The committee was advised that the scrutiny task group looking at the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community was continuing its work. The final report and recommendations would be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2021.

51

Leisure Centre Management Contract (LCMC) 2019-2020

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the report of the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services providing an overview of the council's Leisure Centre Management Contract between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020. The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services was joined by the relevant Contracts and Partnerships Manager and Sports and Physical Activity Manager. Also in attendance were representatives from SLM/Everyone Active.

Following a brief overview by the Contracts and Partnerships Manager, SLM's Contract Manager for Watford Central and Woodside outlined the constructive working relationship which existed between the leisure centre operator and the council. Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, the leisure centres had enjoyed increasing attendance rates and continued success encouraging people from Watford's different communities to move from being inactive to active. SLM retained a strong focus on employing local people in its centres and engaging with West Herts College on its teaching programmes. On-going work was also being undertaken to reduce the centres' carbon footprints.

There followed a discussion about the impacts of Covid 19 on SLM's operations. SLM's contract manager described the steps taken to ensure that the centres could continue to operate safely following lockdown. These included, coronavirus risk assessments, enhanced cleaning rotas, increased signage and one-way systems, social distancing requirements, and lower occupancy ratios for activities. There had been an inevitable detrimental impact on attendance and membership levels at both centres. To offset this, considerable work had been undertaken to market the leisure centres and review programmes and improve outreach e.g., using online platforms for those who felt unable to return to the centres. Public feedback on SLM's initiatives to respond to the pandemic had been positive.

Both leisure centres had recently achieved "outstanding" Quest accreditation, the leisure industry benchmarking scheme, ranking them amongst the top 10 leisure facilities in the country.

During discussions following the presentation, the following issues were raised:

- Attendance figures in October 2020 compared to October 2019 were 40% lower at Woodside and 17% lower at Watford Central. This reflected the significant reduction in large scale events at Woodside and the different demographics between the centres, with larger numbers of older users at Woodside who had been more reluctant to return.
- Around £30,000 had been spent per leisure centre site to make them Covid secure. Cleaning costs had also increased by around 60%. It was noted that customers had also been proactive in cleaning down equipment and surfaces after use.
- Between 33-36% of members had failed to renew their membership following the first lockdown.
- There had been excellent partnership working between SLM and council to ensure that Covid measures were appropriate and effective, including invaluable feedback from environmental health officers, contract officers and the relevant Portfolio Holder who had all inspected facilities and arrangements prior to reopening.
- In order to encourage people to return, SLM had increased its use of social media highlighting areas of potential concern to customers such as cleaning regimes to encourage people to feel more comfortable using facilities.
- All SLM staff had completed Covid induction training, working bubbles had been created and social distancing was strongly enforced. Wellbeing was a key part of the company's business plan and SLM had drawn on the good practices, particularly around mental health, promoted by the council, chamber of commerce and BID.
- Exercise from home could become a long term phenomenon, building on the online platforms developed during the pandemic. These platforms would become part of the offering to new members. Booking arrangements were also expected to continue since these had provided valuable information around usage which would help optimise management of the facilities and the services offered to customers.
- 99% of the leisure centre staff had been furloughed during lockdown with a core management and maintenance team retained to oversee the facilities.
- Membership direct debits had been suspended during the lockdowns to compensate for facilities being unavailable. Those paying annually would have additional time added to the end of their membership periods.

Commenting on the financial support provided to SLM by the council during the current pandemic, the Portfolio Holder for Client Services confirmed that there had been a loss of income of £721k. Additional support of £350k had been agreed for SLM. These figures had been included in recent Finance Scrutiny Committee papers for members to scrutinise. The Portfolio Holder further advised that the health and wellbeing of Watford's residents was of paramount

importance and the council was committed to providing excellent leisure centre facilities in the town. It was anticipated that the council's costs would be recovered over the term of the current contract with SLM through an enhanced profit share arrangement.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the report and supporting information and makes any recommendations to Cabinet.

52 **Progress report on strategic framework for O&S Committee 26 November 2020**

Scrutiny members received the report of the Executive Head of Strategy and Communications and Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office setting out progress on the key elements of the council's strategic framework comprising the Council Plan 2020-24 and Delivery Plan 2020-22; the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 and Delivery Plan; and Covid-19 Road to Renewal Plan.

In order to focus on the main issues for consideration, members were provided with a short presentation. The Executive Head of Strategy and Communications, Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office and Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development presented the different strands of the strategic framework and answered scrutiny members' questions.

It was noted that the Council Plan, which covered a four year period, was intended to strengthen the council's corporate framework, establishing its purpose, ambitions and how these would be achieved. The Delivery Plan, translated these ideas into outcomes over the next 18 month period. The documents were underpinned by the budget and had been shared across services and the organisation to gather views and buy-in from staff who were pivotal to ensuring their success.

The strategic framework provided focus to the council's response to Covid and how it would support residents and businesses. Quarterly updates on progress, one report per plan, were being provided to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Residents would also be updated annually in About Watford.

In response to questions from scrutiny members, the following points were raised:

- As part of its renewed commitment to local businesses, the council had commissioned Wenta to provide governance advice, guidance and support.
- Work on the new building at Watford Business Park had been agreed and commenced prior to the current pandemic. It was a long term project intended to provide more modern, flexible space for smaller businesses which would complement existing buildings predominantly occupied by larger companies.
- Around 50% of staff had stated that they would like more flexible working arrangements in the future. Regular surveys were taken every 6-8 weeks to monitor aspirations. Although face-to-face interaction was still wanted, it was anticipated that staff would return to the office for two or three days a week in the future.
- Only a small number of officers had contracted Covid 19; the exact number would be confirmed outside the meeting. However, it was acknowledged that this figure would not be robust in the absence of accurate testing early in the pandemic.
- As for other illnesses, Covid cases were recorded as sickness absences, but did not attract management procedures and processes to ensure that staff did not feel a pressure to return to work too soon.
- The Managing Director was clear that the wellbeing of staff was a top priority for the council. A wide ranging employee assistance programme was available for staff who were ill, or who had been shielding or supporting relatives. This included free and confidential counselling, information and signposting through a dedicated area of the council's intranet, access to employee mental health first aiders as well as managerial and HR support. Further initiatives were being reviewed.
- The council's Staff Ambassadors Group was a grouping of around 32 staff from all levels of the authority who provided two-way feedback and understanding to Leadership Board on a range of council initiatives. It had its origins in the Watford 2020 pulse group which had successfully provided feedback on the impacts of the cross-council transformation programme. The Staff Ambassadors Group was led by the Managing Director and met approximately every 4-6 weeks.
- The council's mental health champion, Councillor Rabi Martins, suggested that the council's significant and impressive focus around mental health issues, and the steps taken to be mindful of the impacts of current working arrangements on staff, should be highlighted and shared with local businesses as an exemplar of good practice.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress report.

End of Quarter 2 - 2020/21 Key Performance Indicator Report

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Business Intelligence Manager setting out the council's key performance indicators for the end of quarter 2 2020/21.

Providing a background to the new arrangements for the council's key performance report, the Group Head of Transformation explained that the Watford 2020 programme had recognised the value of business intelligence to make informed decisions for the council's operations. As a result, the authority had invested in a business intelligence platform and now employed a dedicated manager. Work was being undertaken to develop a strategy to enhance the council's use of real time data to inform corporate decision-making.

The Business Intelligence Manager introduced the report and during discussions the following areas were highlighted:

- Covid 19 continued to have a significant impact on services and prevented accurate comparisons.
- A large number of services were performing above target, however 14 were below. Those doing well included planning and household waste and recycling. The latter was notable at a time of new green waste charges. 56% of residents had registered for the new service, slightly short of the 60% target planned.
- Sickness absence rates at 3.85 days per employee were very low, deemed one of the lowest levels in Hertfordshire. Near normal levels were now being recorded as the council moved into the winter cough and cold season.
- Poor levels of timely return to work interviews reflected only a small number of late submissions against a backdrop of low staff absence rates.
- Staff satisfaction levels, previously recorded using an annual snapshot of the current mood, had reduced and were thought to reflect a lack of face to face contact between officers. The results were expected to change as more regular PDRs were recorded. It was confirmed that the unions had had an opportunity to review the content of the new PDR system, including the staff satisfaction questions, before it had been introduced.
- There had been a drop in the number of performance development reviews completed on time. Whilst conversations between managers and staff were taking place, the previous PDR process had been convoluted and had been unpopular with staff. The new I-Perform system was more agile.

- Missed targets in customer services were the result of a 40% increase in calls. Particular spikes had been seen with the introduction of new green waste services and when council tax reminders had been sent out to residents after the first lockdown. This had resulted in long wait times and some missed calls. The council continued to focus on digitising services and self-serving and the target was that 70% of transactions would be either digital or self-serve.
- IT performance indicators had been refocused to consider not just how well the service responded to what went wrong, but also to measure what was going well, e.g., up time on the network. The reliability of the council's IT systems was integral to the council's current working arrangements and satisfaction levels were good.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes:

1. the key performance indicator results for Quarter 2 2020/21.
2. that the KPIs continue to be reviewed as part of the Business Intelligence Strategy, and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be kept up to date with any changes to the KPI's, or the process for collecting, analysing or presenting KPI data.

54 **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 2020/21 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

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

Council Parker, as the council's appointed representative to Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, reported that the next meeting would take place on 18 December. At this meeting she would continue to push for progress on the recommendations of the Health Services for the Deaf scrutiny task group. Failing this it was suggested that the council should contact the Clinical Commissioning Group directly.

56 **Work Programme**

The scrutiny committee received the 2020/21 work programme.

The Senior Democratic Services Manager advised that since publication of the agenda it had been agreed that West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust could attend the next meeting on 17 December to discuss the Trust's plans to achieve "teaching trust" status. This would formally recognise its significant teaching commitment.

RESOLVED –

that the 2020/21 work programme be noted.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

57 **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 17 December.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.30 pm