

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 December 2020

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

Also present: Ben Johnson, Group Director of Operations, Watford  
Community Housing  
Tina Barnard, Chief Executive, Watford Community Housing  
Councillor Asif Khan, Councillor Mark Watkin and Councillor  
Tim Williams

Officers: Group Head of Transformation  
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services  
Head of Enterprise 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.

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

Apologies were received from Councillors Martins and Mauthoor.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 60 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed. It was noted that these would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

### 61 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

The committee was advised that the scrutiny task group looking at the issues of importance to Watford's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) community had held a number of evidence sessions. Early in the New Year, attention would

be turning to the second part of the task group's work i.e., reviewing the council's street naming policy. The final report and recommendations would be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 February 2021.

62

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

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on the outstanding recommendations of the Watford Community Housing Task Group which had published its report in February 2019. Watford Community Housing (WCH) was represented by its Chief Executive, Tina Barnard, and Ben Johnson, Group Director of Operations. Councillor Asif Khan, chair of the task group, also attended this part of the meeting.

The Chair invited Ben Johnson to comment on each of the outstanding recommendations in turn. In addition to welcoming the further clarifications provided by the trust, members raised the following issues:

#### **Provide information to residents explaining how to notify them when a service, included in their service charge, was not provided.**

- WCH's processes had been more comprehensively explained, including residents' recourse to further action where they remained dissatisfied with the service and any remedial measures undertaken by the trust.
- It was important for the trust to follow through fully when residents considered that the service had fallen short of what was expected.

#### **Work collaboratively with Hertfordshire County Council and Watford Borough Council to help improve local amenities for tenants and residents.**

- The detrimental impact of Covid 19 on progress was acknowledged.
- Recent joint working between local councillors, Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and Veolia to resolve fly tipping issues was recognised as a good example of what could be achieved. It was suggested that further collaborative working of this type would be useful, however this should be led by Watford Borough Council. Local councillors should be kept informed of this work.

#### **Outline any major works that will be required, including when these will be completed and the property ready for habitation, when void properties are placed on the 'home choice letting' scheme.**

- Proactive maintenance by the trust as well as prompt action where the need for repairs was identified was important to prevent the requirement for more extensive repairs further down the line.

**Complete repairs on the first visit to the satisfaction of tenants in 85% of cases with details published in the annual report.**

- Progress to achieve this recommendation was noted.

**A) Complete remaining repairs to the satisfaction of tenants within 30 days of the initial reporting in 95% of cases and include the outcomes in the annual report.**

- It was important to ensure that residents, either without access to online means or uncomfortable with its use, should also be able to provide customer feedback e.g., by speaking to someone.
- The trust should keep this recommendation under review to ensure that they were receiving sufficiently representative feedback from residents.

**B) Not close a case until the resident was content with the repair.**

- Progress to achieve this recommendation was noted.

**Give any positive feedback received from tenants on repair works carried out to the person or team who carried out the repair and include information on the number of compliments received in the annual report.**

- Progress to achieve this recommendation was noted.

**Ensure that records of tenant's casework were comprehensive, timely and kept up to date, and seek to introduce a computerised central recording system during the next financial year.**

- Tracking work flow against customer cases was key. Councillors were sometimes frustrated in their own case work where actions logged with the trust were lost. Central record keeping would help to prevent this.
- The trust's Chief Executive encouraged councillors to follow the trust's protocol and contact the customer relations team in the first instance. Where they had examples of information being lost or not acted upon, it was important for them to provide evidence so the trust could follow-up.

Councillor Khan acknowledged the excellent cross party work which had been achieved by the task group. The resultant report and recommendations had done much to progress the concerns of residents and improve Watford Community Housing's processes and procedures. Overview and Scrutiny Committee had an important role to play in making sure that the council's relationship with WCH continued to work well and to ensure that the trust provided the best possible service to its residents.

The Chair thanked Tina Barnard and Ben Johnson, wishing Mr Johnson well in his new role outside WCH.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee approves the updates provided by Watford Community Housing.

63

### **Overview and Scrutiny Committee 24 September - actions update**

Scrutiny members received the report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer. This noted a request by Councillor Dhindsa that there be a further opportunity to review the actions update from Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 September.

The scrutiny committee was advised that Councillor Dhindsa's interest related to three actions arising from the Voluntary Commissioning Framework report:

1. Specialist language assistance – whether money previously set aside had been ring fenced and, if so, was available to provide interpretation services today.
2. Impact of the Covid 19 lockdown on the demand for virtual activities from BAME residents:
  - a. had participation levels increased or decreased during lockdown
  - b. where there had been an increase, how this had this been achieved.
3. Women only swimming – determine whether current demand supported an additional session.

It was noted that the Head of Leisure and Environment had undertaken some further research around these questions which had been circulated to all members in advance of the meeting. The Head of Leisure and Environment was in attendance to answer members' queries. During discussions, a number of following-up actions were agreed:

#### **Specialist language assistance**

- Outline the four locations used by the Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver its outreach sessions.
- Explain how the four locations were advertised.

#### **Impact of Covid 19 lockdown on the demand for virtual activities from BAME residents**

- Determine what monitoring data was held by Everyone Active on its members participating in virtual activities

### **Women only swimming**

- Explain how the women's only swimming session was advertised – it was suggested that information on the session should be highlighted in the council's About Watford publication and advertised in local community centres and in the Women's Centre.
- Review the attendance figures post Covid 19 to determine if a further session was required and was commercially viable.

Scrutiny members agreed that further discussions should take place outside the meeting between Councillor Dhindsa and the relevant officers. The Chair offered to help facilitate these discussions.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the actions update and requested further information as indicated.

64

### **Watford 2020 Programme Closure**

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office. This provided a final review of the council's corporate transformation programme which had ended in March 2020.

Providing a detailed overview of his extensive report, the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office drew attention to the lessons learnt and recommendations arising from the programme. These included:

- the beneficial impacts of Covid 19 on delivering aspects of the culture change envisaged, particularly around flexible working and the increased use of technology;
- creation of a new Commercial Strategy and Commercial Income and Investment Board to drive the council's ambitious business agenda;
- the value of a clear programme governance structure and vision, that had been adopted by the newly formed Enterprise Programme Management Office;
- clear corporate focus, priorities and direction provided by the Council Plan 2020-24 and associated Delivery Plan 2020-22 to best manage and direct internal resources; and

- culture of two-way engagement with staff from across the organisation successfully trialled in the programme's Pulse Group and now taken up in the Staff Ambassadors Group.

It was noted that the objectives of the programme had been largely achieved.

In terms of benefits, savings of £886,000 had been achieved by the programme for the financial year 2020/21. It was anticipated that the target of £1m would be exceeded by the financial year 2021/22.

The Portfolio Holder for Resources and Customer Service praised the Head of Enterprise Programme Management Office for his professionalism in driving the transformation programme. The support of staff and members for the programme had been maintained throughout and the result was a council able to serve its local community better. The Portfolio Holder particularly acknowledged the constructive challenge and oversight provided by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Notes the lessons learnt and recommendations (detailed within section 3 of Appendix 1 of the report)
- Notes the formal closure of the programme

## 65 **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.

## 66 **Work Programme**

The scrutiny committee received the 2020/21 work programme. Reviewing the planned items for the meeting on 4 February, it was requested that a representative from Veolia should attend the meeting.

RESOLVED –

that the 2020/21 work programme be noted.

67 **Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 4 February 2021.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.20 pm