

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4 February 2021

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

Also present: Councillor Collett (for minute items 68-77)
Councillor Ezeifedi (for minute items 68-73)
Councillor Tim Williams (for minute items 68-77)
Darren Harding, Senior Contract Manager – Veolia (for
minute items 68-72)
Nick Graham, Contract Manager Street Cleansing, Parks and
Open Spaces – Veolia (for minute items 68-72)
Julie Hughes, Tree Manager – Veolia (for minute items 68-72)

Officers: Senior Democratic Services Officer
Group Head of Transformation
Contract Manager - Parks and Streetcare
Head of Parks, Open Spaces and Projects
Head of Leisure and Environment

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

68 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There was a change of membership for this meeting, Councillor Dychton replaced Councillor Saffery.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

70 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2020 were agreed. It was noted that these would be signed once officers and members were able to return to the town hall.

71 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

The committee was advised that the Responding to the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford's BAME communities and street name policy review task group had held its last meeting on 5 January. The final report was being considered later on the agenda.

Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 12 January. The committee's chair, Councillor Turmaine, had provided all members with a detailed overview of recent discussions at Full Council on 26 January.

72

Update on Streets and Parks Contract (Veolia)

Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Veolia, which was represented by Darren Harding (Senior Contract Manager), Nick Graham (Contract Manager Street Cleansing, Parks and Open Spaces) and Julie Hughes (Tree Manager). The presentation focused on activities in three key areas: leaf fall season, street trees and street cleaning.

During discussions following the presentation, the following issues were raised by scrutiny members:

- Veolia maintained a database of all trees in their care in the borough. Where members were unsure about who was responsible for a particular tree, the Tree Manager would be able to provide clarity. She also welcomed suggestions from councillors about the siting of new trees.
- The agency agreement with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on Watford's street trees did not cover planting. These costs were covered by Watford Borough Council. It was noted that the town's tree coverage was above the national average and the council had ambitions to increase this in coming years.
- In addition to new tree planting schemes on Clarendon Road and St Albans Road, 100 new trees would be planted across the town in the current municipal year. As the council's current tree planting budget was relatively small, additional funding was required to help replace missing or damaged trees e.g., using locality money. Trees cost £350 each depending on size and species and included maintenance. These costs were regularly checked to ensure value for money for the council.
- Information on the schedules for on-going street-cleaning and deep cleaning for specific roads was held by council officers; councillors could check planned work in their wards. Some information was also listed on the council's website. Veolia operatives visited all areas in the town weekly to help identify where particular focus was required. They also welcomed feedback from councillors on concerns in their wards.

- Street cleaning operatives and park rangers worked with the police to identify and monitor areas where drugs paraphernalia were discovered. Barrow beats carried sharps boxes to mitigate risks.
- Take-away packaging had the potential to generate large amounts of litter in the streets. Where this became problematic, Environmental Health officers were asked to intervene with the relevant business.

The Portfolio Holder for Client Services, Councillor Williams, commented that members should use the council’s website to report problems. The “Report it” function was effective and Veolia had proved to be extremely responsive to concerns raised using this route.

Councillor Williams also encouraged all members to contact the Tree Manager with suggestions and concerns about the borough’s trees. He noted that the agency agreement with HCC was coming up for renewal and would be carefully reviewed.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the update on the council’s street and parks contract.

73

Responding to the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford’s BAME communities and street name policy review task group

The Chair of the Responding to the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities and street name policy review task group, Councillor Favour Ezeifedi, was invited to introduce the task group’s final report and recommendations.

Councillor Ezeifedi thanked the committee for the opportunity to lead this important task group which followed her motion to Council on 14 July 2020. She described the task group’s activities, the evidence gathered from witnesses and the arguments to support the final recommendations. Councillor Ezeifedi noted that local BAME communities were keen to continue to engage with the council about how policies were shaped in the future.

Commenting on concerns raised during the witness sessions about the higher risks of infection associated with living in multi-generational or overcrowded housing, Councillor Ezeifedi suggested that whilst action was needed at a national level the council should continue to work with its partners and other agencies to tackle concerns locally wherever possible.

Councillor Ezeifedi asked for her thanks to the Democratic Services Officers who had supported the task group to be placed on record.

The scrutiny committee welcomed the task group's thorough and well-argued report which had shone a light on the experiences of local BAME communities during the current pandemic and produced a set of sensible and worthwhile recommendations. In particular, the recommendation for councillors to maximise their community role by sharing public health messages and encouraging Covid 19 vaccination take-up was both timely and crucial.

There was wide support for the council to renew its focus on equalities issues. Scrutiny members supported the task group's recommendations in this area, including the development of the authority's existing equalities statement into a corporate equalities policy and for mandatory training on equalities and unconscious bias for all staff and members to be renewed regularly.

Addressing the task group's work on the council's street name policy, members particularly welcomed the proposal to commission Watford Museum to devise an exhibition exploring the background and history of the town's road names. It was suggested that the work might include individual histories of BAME residents who had set down roots in the town.

The Portfolio Holder for Community, Councillor Collett, congratulated the task group on its excellent work. She noted that the task group's recommendations dovetailed with the authority's Road to Renewal activities and gave impetus to the council's desire to engage with the town's diverse communities to support the town as it emerged from the Covid 19 pandemic.

RESOLVED –

that the final report and recommendations of the Responding to the impacts of Covid 19 on Watford's BAME communities and street name policy review task group be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet.

Action: Senior Democratic Services Officer

74

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.

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

As the Council's appointed representative to the County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, the Chair gave a brief update on discussions at the last meeting on 18 December. She noted that the minutes of that meeting had been circulated separately to scrutiny members.

The Chair advised that she would be asking the Mayor to write to the Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee to update him on HCC's progress to respond to recommendations from the Health Services for the Deaf scrutiny task group.

76 **Work Programme**

The scrutiny committee received the 2020/21 work programme.

RESOLVED –

that the 2020/21 work programme be noted.

77 **Date of Next Meetings**

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 25 February.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.05 pm