

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 September 2021

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillor J Dhindsa (Vice-Chair)
Councillors P Hannon, R Martins, T Osborn, M Parker, G Saffery,
M Turmaine and D Walford

Also present: Chief Inspector Ian Grout

Officers: Executive Head of Corporate Strategy and Communications
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Senior Projects Officer and CCTV Manager
Senior Democratic Services Officer (JK)

20 Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership

There were two changes of membership for this meeting: Councillor Martins replaced Councillor Feldman and Councillor Walford replaced Councillor Stanton.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities had sent her apologies.

The Group Head of Transformation and the Business Intelligence Manager had also sent their apologies.

21 Disclosure of interests (if any)

There were no disclosures of interest.

22 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 were submitted and signed.

23 Other scrutiny meetings - minutes

It was noted that Finance Scrutiny Committee had met on 13 September. Minutes of the meeting were available on the council's website.

CCTV in Watford

The scrutiny committee received a presentation of the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services, the CCTV Manager and Chief Inspector Grout of Hertfordshire Constabulary. A copy of the presentation had been added to the agenda papers.

The presentation followed a petition considered at Council and looked at the role of CCTV in the community safety partnership (CSP). The presentation also covered the balance between freedom, privacy and safety, the strong partnership approach in Watford, crime figures and CCTV locations and cost.

Following the presentation, the committee asked questions and made comments.

A request was made for levels of racially aggravated assaults or other incidents. The Chief Inspector agreed to circulate this information to the committee.

Discussing Watford's crime levels in comparison with other CSPs in Hertfordshire, the committee was advised that all CSPs had seen a decline in crime last year and post-lockdown crime levels were near-normal. The districts with higher crime levels than Watford were Dacorum, St Albans, Welwyn Hatfield and Stevenage.

It was noted that the number of people visiting the night-time economy were high and it had been a challenge for the police, particularly in the early hours of the morning. The town centre attracted people from North London and other surrounding areas.

The Chief Inspector confirmed that although animal thefts had been an issue nationally there had been few incidents of animal thefts reported locally.

There would be a planned review of the CCTV system to cover locations, the potential for mobile units and commercialisation. Members asked about the possibility of further coverage in areas outside the town centre including St Albans Road and Whippendell Road. Officers looked at locations proactively and there had to be sound justifications for additional cameras but these areas could be considered in the forthcoming review.

Following a further suggestion, officers advised that the potential for contributions from venues, could be considered. It was further noted that certain venues already contributed to the business improvement district, paid for their Scan Net systems and had other demands on their income.

The committee was informed that the CCTV coverage of the bike store at Watford Junction was paid for by Hertfordshire County Council and they would need to provide funding for any changes.

Members highlighted that residents often had concerns around CCTV cameras and their privacy. It would be useful to have data around arrests made on the basis of CCTV and how much police time was saved. The CCTV Manager produced a monthly report outlining different types of crimes addressed, he agreed to provide a summary for the committee. It was not, however, possible to quantify the extent to which the cameras were a deterrent for crime.

The committee asked about the role of CCTV in drug-related offences. There were a number of operations in the town centre with support from the control room which helped to identify key people coming into the town.

Considering the original petition presented to councillors, the Chief Inspector advised that crime levels for areas were key in determining CCTV locations. CCTV could not prevent all offences and the type of camera in operation also made a difference to their use.

The committee noted the effectiveness of the co-location of the control room and the police station and members were encouraged to visit. The control room would be retained in the new police station in George Street, it was hoped the move would take place by summer 2022.

The Chief Inspector and officers were thanked for their comprehensive presentation and for attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the presentation.

Action: CCTV Manager and Chief Inspector Grout

25

Council Performance Report Quarter 1 2021/22

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Business Intelligence Manager setting out the council's performance indicators at the end of quarter 1.

The Executive Head of Strategy and Communications introduced the report which covered the period up to the end of June. She discussed the key highlights for service areas, including ongoing impacts of Covid, which had been identified in the report.

During discussions on the report, members raised the following points requesting additional information where relevant:

- Housing benefit performance had not yet returned to target levels. Pre-Covid it had been one of the highest performing services in the country. Resources had been diverted to test and trace and business grants. There was an aspiration to return to previous levels and improvements were anticipated in Q2 and Q3. The forthcoming impact of changes to universal credit and fuel prices were noted. The Head of Revenues and Benefits would be asked to provide a briefing paper.
- While planning performance indicators were strong, residents regularly expressed concerns about the planning process and outcomes to councillors. The service was efficient but residents' satisfaction with outcomes was a different issue. There had been some communications around this in the past but it was an ongoing message that needed to go out.
- PI 21 reported 56.2% of waste recycled and composted, officers undertook to confirm the details of this indicator.
- There was a programme of reviewing levels of litter and detritus in different wards and types of locality. Different areas were inspected in different quarters.

The Chair expressed her thanks to staff and how they had adapted during the pandemic.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes:

1. the key performance indicator results for Quarter 1 2021/22, appended at Appendix A to the report.
2. that the KPIs will 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 KPIs, or the process for collecting, analysing or presenting KPI data.

Action: Head of Revenues and Benefits and Group Head of Community and Environmental Services

26

Call-in

No decisions had been called in.

27 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2021-22 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the 2021/22 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

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

The council's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Grimston, advised that the Health Scrutiny Committee had not met. She undertook to circulate a report on the latest Covid situation as well flu and booster vaccinations.

Action: Councillor Grimston

29 **Work programme**

Members were invited to review Overview and Scrutiny Committee's draft work programme for 2021/22 and suggest any additional items for review.

Noting the item on sustainable transport contracts at the meeting in October 2021, the Vice Chair asked for the ArrivaClick usage figures since lockdown to be included. The committee discussed the request, some felt the figures would not be reflective given ongoing home-working and fewer people travelling. It was agreed that usage figures should come to Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting in June or July 2022.

The following further suggestions were made for the work programme:

- to review the consultation for the sustainable transport strategy.
- to revisit the CCTV service following its move to the new police station in June 2022.
- to review the benefits service and the processing of claims.

The Chair added that she was keen that a scrutiny task group be set up and encouraged members to think about potential topics for discussion in October.

RESOLVED –

that the 2021/22 work programme be noted and updated according to discussions.

30

Dates of next meetings

It was noted that the next meetings would take place on Thursday 21 October and Thursday 18 November.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 8.30 pm