

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 February 2022

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillors S Feldman, P Hannon, M Parker, G Saffery and
M Turmaine

Also present: Councillor A Dychton, Portfolio Holder (minute numbers 70
to 73)
Bob Jones, Chief Executive, W3RT (minute numbers 70 to 73)
Clare Baars-Gordon, Head of Community Development, W3RT
(minute numbers 70 to 73)

Officers: Senior Democratic Services Officer (JK)
Contract & Partnership Manager – Leisure & Community
Services
Head of Leisure and Environmental Services
Group Head of Community and Environmental Services
Head of Planning and Development

70 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dhindsa, Osborn and Stanton.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

72 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2022 were submitted and signed.

73 **Review of the Voluntary Sector Strategy and W3RT task group recommendations**

The committee received a report providing an update on the recommendations made by the voluntary sector strategy and the W3RT task group.

Councillor Saffery introduced the work of the task group. The task group had been set up in the wake of the pandemic and the work around the community

fund to support local charities through Covid. The recommendations sought to review the CVS function and ensure the partnership between the council and W3RT remained strong and effective. Significant progress had been made to date and the emergency support would result in a positive legacy for the community.

The Head of Leisure and Environmental Services introduced the report to the committee. The report provided an update on two parallel pieces of work which took place in 2020/21: the voluntary sector strategy and the W3RT scrutiny task group. There was a liaison group chaired by the Deputy Mayor which charted the progress on an ongoing basis. A number of recommendations were complete and others remained ongoing. Some required a multi-agency approach which were being progressed through the liaison group. There was good progress across a range of areas.

The Head of Community Development at W3RT, Clare Baars Gordon, introduced herself to the committee. There was an emphasis on collaboration and partnership working in the sector and beyond with the business sector. Responding to a question about levels of volunteers and the challenges of working in hybrid ways. Officers noted that the hybrid approach to meetings was welcomed not least for its sustainability benefits. The council was in the process of implementing hybrid technology for meetings and there were also grants available from funders to create hybrid spaces.

Clare Baars-Gordon advised that Covid had had a significant impact on volunteering nationally. Many volunteers were of retirement age and they were beginning to return to their roles. There was an opportunity to engage other groups within the community such as young people and those of working age.

Discussing the engagement with young people, it was noted that W3RT were working with West Herts College and sixth forms to encourage more students to engage with volunteering to enhance their skills development and to benefit the community. The committee was advised that 19% of support provided was for younger people, including for mental health and wellbeing.

Addressing the cost of living crisis, food poverty charities were reporting significant challenges this year. Discussions were ongoing with the council and the Chamber of Commerce around logistics and space. Information from support services was regularly shared. The CAB was also supporting residents with energy costs.

Discussing engagement with the business sector, the team at W3RT had experience in this and held monthly discussions with the Chamber of Commerce. Corporate volunteering programmes created benefits for all involved.

Councillor Saffery commented that the task group's recommendation sought to create a framework for ongoing work and improvement. The council's role was to be a facilitator and he noted that physical space remained a challenge for local groups. He was pleased with all that had been achieved.

Responding to a question about how the councillors can support the sector, Bob Jones asked that the council and councillors continue to promote volunteering and community engagement at its broadest level. The voluntary sector had sometimes been seen as an adjunct of formal statutory services. It was important that the sector was not seen as a delivery arm but as an alternative.

Providing further details about W3RT's hospital discharge service, it was noted that W3RT was one of the lead agencies in the community navigator service which undertook community prescribing services. There were two projects: one trained volunteers to call people on hospital waiting lists. The other provided volunteers who regularly called patients following discharge and ensure they were well-supported to reduce readmissions to hospital.

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Dychton, highlighted how challenging the last two years had been for community groups. The partnership had pooled communities and funds to support all groups. She was proud of all that had been achieved.

It was agreed that the progress of the recommendations would be reviewed again. The Chair expressed her thanks to the attendees for their input.

RESOLVED –

that the updates on the recommendations be noted.

74 **Electric Vehicles Task Group final report**

The scrutiny committee received the final report of the Electric Vehicles Task Group which contained proposed recommendations to Cabinet.

The Chair of the task group, Councillor Feldman, introduced the report noting that the review had been proposed by the Portfolio Holder for Sustainability and Transport. He expressed the task group's thanks to the officers who had supported the work.

Councillor Feldman noted that while there was much work to be done, the council was ambitious in enabling electric vehicle (EV) use locally. One challenge would be accessing the funding to continue to grow the charging infrastructure.

A key recommendation in the report was the development of an Electric Vehicle Strategy for Watford which would dovetail with the Sustainable Transport Strategy's vision for more active travel. An EV strategy would consider the diverse nature of Watford's streets and determine where would be most appropriate to install charging infrastructure. Other recommendations included working with Hertfordshire County Council to find a way forward regarding the use of lamp columns for charging infrastructure.

Responding to a question about how electric vehicles were enabled through planning policies, the Head of Planning and Development advised that in the forthcoming local plan, 20% of parking spaces in new developments would need to have active charging capabilities while the remaining spaces would need passive capability, i.e. the ability to install charging units in the future. It was noted that the government intended to extend the Building Regulations further to require 100% of new homes to have active charging capabilities. The local policies would be kept under review.

Councillor Feldman added that the task group had discussed working with developers to help partnerships with the primary local provider, Electric Blue. The committee noted the Department for Transport data included in the report which showed high levels of registrations for electric vehicles in Watford, which represented more than 50% of the registrations in Hertfordshire. Members asked for further background to these figures and the factors which might account for them as other areas had not seen the same level of increase.

Action - Senior Democratic Services Officer

RESOLVED –

that the recommendations be agreed and forwarded to Cabinet.

75 **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.

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

The council's representative on the Health Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Grimston, advised that there had been no meetings of the committee.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

77 **Work Programme**

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

RESOLVED –

that the 2021/22 work programme be noted.

78 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be on 17 March 2022. This would be the last meeting of the committee in the current meeting cycle.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 7.55 pm