

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 October 2022

Present: Councillor  
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors T Osborn, S Ahmed, P Hannon, P Jeffree, P Kloss,  
K Rodrigues, G Saffery and M Turmaine

Also present: Councillor Aga Dychton

Officers: Executive Director of Place  
Director of Partnerships  
Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy  
Associate Director of Environment  
Community Safety Co-ordinator  
Contract & Partnership Manager – Leisure & Community  
Services  
Senior Democratic Services Officer

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

There were three changes of membership for this meeting; Councillor Hannon replaced Councillor Feldman, Councillor G Saffery replaced Councillor Martins and Councillor Jeffree replaced Councillor Stiff.

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

Councillor Rodrigues declared that he was on the board of Watford Citizens' Advice Bureau and Councillor Saffery declared that he was a member of the board of Home Start Watford. The committee was not taking any formal decisions and therefore it was appropriate for them to remain in the meeting.

### 31 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022 were submitted and signed.

### 32 **Review of the Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework Year 3 (2021-2022)**

The scrutiny committee received the report of the Contracts and Partnerships Manager. The Contracts and Partnerships Manager introduced the report noting

the ongoing impact of Covid on many organisations during 2021/22. The Commissioning Framework had been extended for a further year as a result. The cost of living crisis and the impact on the funded organisations was a current focus for this area of work. Officers were reviewing the data collection for the framework to ensure it was an accurate representation of the work undertaken. The key performance indicators would be reviewed during Q3 to ensure that new measures would be in place for the new financial year.

Responding to questions from the committee that had been sent in advance:

- Watford Palace Theatre had taken a cautious approach to reopening following Covid. Initiatives that were being taken forward to increase and widen its reach included supporting local artists, growing the number of comedy and children's shows, undertaking youth theatre workshops and co-producing new shows with other theatres.
- The figures in relation to other support offered by Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) were particularly high during 2019/20 as an exercise had taken place to contact all groups that year. Many groups were closed due to the pandemic and the numbers were also affected by staffing changes. The KPIs for W3RT would be reviewed to ensure that they better reflected the wide range of activities undertaken and new initiatives launched, such as the Golden Volunteer platform to be used going forward.
- The data showed a small number of Watford residents visiting the Pump House Theatre. There had been a slow recovery from Covid and the data did not reflect the full range of use of the theatre nor group bookings.

Discussing the report, the committee raised the following areas:

- The Golden Volunteer Platform was working well and would be further publicised at an upcoming volunteer event.
- The impact of the current high levels of inflation on the commissioned organisations. It was confirmed that a standstill budget had been put in place before the inflationary environment had changed. This was challenging for all groups, and the council, and was difficult to frame in the absence of clear government support. Officers were working closely with groups and undertaking work to determine what support could be offered.

The Portfolio Holder extended her thanks to the Contracts and Partnerships Manager for her dedicated work and her congratulations to the Associate Director of Environment in his new role.

RESOLVED –

that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the report

33

### **Community Safety Partnership - mid-year update**

The committee received a presentation of the Community Safety Manager. Identifying the four key priorities for the Partnership; serious violent crime, violence against women and girls, community wellbeing and reassure and inform. He highlighted key points to the committee:

#### Serious violent crime

- The strength of the prevention work in relation to this priority would be tested as part of the review cycle.
- A group of 13-15 year-olds who had been responsible for a number of criminal incidents from bullying to robbery and threats to families had been apprehended and were in the criminal justice system. There were some very serious behaviours demonstrated and as such the strongest penalties, including Criminal Behaviour Orders to restrict their access to the town, had been recommended.

#### Violence against women and girls

- This had been targeted due to changing trends in the area.
- While the Safer Streets bid had been unsuccessful, a number of smaller projects would be delivered to address the issue. These included environmental improvements in alleyways and other areas to improve safety as well as addressing unacceptable behaviours in the male community.
- There had been extensive consultation with some new groups which had proved fruitful in understanding risks and threats.

#### Community wellbeing

- This work was designed to match community tensions and involved positive presence of partners at community events where there was a hotspot in reporting.
- Watford Community Housing were assisting in identifying very specific areas where an increased presence would be valued and provide reassurance.

#### Reassure and inform

- This priority was around public engagement by all partners.
- The multi-agency approach was effective at dealing with issues and was the biggest partnership in the county.

- While crime rates had increased this year due to the earlier impact of Covid on figures, it was in line with predictions and had fallen since the New Year. The figures involved were small.
- Antisocial behaviour was below last year's levels and remained flat. Early intervention by partners had prevented issues becoming reports to the police or council and this was gratifying to see.

The Community Safety Manager further advised that a protocol was being developed to use the civil enforcement officers to promote safety. Along with Watford Community Housing, park and car park staff, they would be alerted to details of missing persons who were at risk of harm in Watford.

Referring to the mismatch between crime levels and perceptions of safety, the officer underlined the importance of reporting issues and using the online Echo systems. If residents were not satisfied that they had received a proportional response, they could make use of the Community Trigger. A thorough investigation would be made by the Community Safety Manager followed by an independent panel to assess the response. These often led to new suggestions for addressing issues.

Discussing reporting on behalf of residents, councillors were encouraged to report if the resident was not able to do so themselves. Reporting on behalf of a vulnerable resident could identify a potential safeguarding need. Reports were reviewed weekly and if councillors reported on behalf of residents this was taken seriously. When reporting online, councillors could note that they were reporting on behalf of others.

Responding to a query about a particular issue in Holywell, the Community Safety Manager recognised the problem noting that he did not think fake CCTV cameras were an effective deterrent.

The committee discussed concerns around the targeting of the homes of Asian families for theft of jewellery. The issue was not reflected in the data and more reporting was needed to ensure it was given priority through the Echo system. The police should be providing advice around prevention and what to do if a household was targeted.

Police numbers were rarely at full strength due to the impact of the wider operations, training and illness. The Community Safety Partnership (CSP) were working for Watford to be allocated more police officers, as the town had the biggest footfall in Hertfordshire. A needs-based approach would benefit police numbers in the town and this was being considered by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Councillors reported an increase in complaints about antisocial behaviour and other issues in Cassiobury Park. The approach was to disperse these groups who were causing a nuisance; the courts were rarely keen to put in stringent measures. Enforcement action against vulnerable people was also difficult. The issues were not ignored and work with partners was vital.

Referring to reports of an incident of an individual who was in possession of a knife in the town centre, it was confirmed that one person was involved and the injuries were not life-threatening. The individual was not known in the town and had badly misjudged the situation.

Members were of the view that a strategic approach was needed to address issues such as drug-dealing. This message was being underlined to the PCC and the CSP were delivering an effective response and identifying gaps in provision. New police officers were working in Watford but required a training process.

Hertfordshire was a very safe county for crime and other areas were seeing a rise in risks and threats which were known to Watford. The Portfolio Holder underlined that the CSP worked hard to protect residents and there was confidence that the approach was the most effective.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

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### **Sustainability Strategy Task Group Membership**

The scrutiny committee received a report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer asking the committee to appoint a new Chair for the task group.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which had been deferred from the previous meeting of the committee. Councillor Stiff had previously been appointed as the Chair by Overview and Scrutiny Committee but she was no longer able to participate. The committee was asked to appoint a new chair and was invited to make a further nomination to the task group, should an additional councillor wish to participate.

RESOLVED –

1. that Councillor Mark Hofman be appointed Chair of the Sustainability Strategy Task Group.
2. that one further nomination could be made to the group by email, if requested before the first meeting.

35 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2022/23 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2022/23 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

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

The Chair had attended the last meeting of the County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee and provided a verbal update.

The most pertinent issue to Watford was the CQC inspection of Watford General Hospital Teaching Trust's maternity services. There were some serious shortcomings identified which impacted women and families. Many issues related to the required rebuild of the hospital facilities and could not be easily addressed until that took place.

He further reported that ambulance response times and hospital handover times were showing improvement and were similar to national averages. The East of England Ambulance Trust had committed to recruiting 500 clinicians this year; they had agreed to report back on this commitment.

Action: The Senior Democratic Services to report back on whether the public health team reported into the Health Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

37 **Work Programme**

The committee reviewed the latest version of the work programme,

RESOLVED –

that the work programme be updated.

38 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would take place on Wednesday 16 November.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.15 pm