

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 July 2023

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Ahmed, D Allen-Williamson, M Devonish, P Hill,
A Khan, L Nembhard and T Osborn

Also present:

Officers: Director of Performance
Associate Director of Planning, Infrastructure and Economy
Senior Democratic Services Officer
Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead
Executive Head of Human Resources and Organisational
Development

11 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There were two changes of membership for this meeting; Councillor Allen-Williamson replaced Councillor Rodrigues and Councillor Nembhard replaced Councillor Kloss.

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

There were no disclosures of interest.

13 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2023 were submitted and signed.

14 **Other scrutiny meetings - minutes**

The Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Khan, updated the committee on the meeting that had taken place on 27 June 2023.

It was noted that the committee had discussed the movement of budgets between financial years and how this could be prevented. Members had also reviewed the revenue and capital budgets, noting

that the economic outlook was difficult and it was important to ensure services were maintained and within budget.

Discussing the Colosseum, it was underlined that it was a complex project with a hopeful completion date of mid-2024. Negotiations were ongoing with AEG who would be running the venue.

Scrutiny of the council's finances remained an important part of the oversight process. While Watford Council was not in a similar position, several councils had significant debt issues and there had been a failure of scrutiny to mitigate these risks.

15 **Call-in**

No call-in had been received.

16 **Focusing on Delivery: Performance and Progress Report Q4 2022/23**

The committee received a report of the Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, the Delivery Support Lead, the Executive Head of Human Resources and the Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead.

The Director of Performance delivered a presentation to the committee, which included highlights of the key projects within the Delivery Plan including the delivery of on-street charging points, the tree planting programme, practical completion of the new crematorium and a successful start to the community lottery.

The Executive Head of HR and OD delivered the update on the Organisational Development Strategy. This included the forthcoming People Strategy, the health and wellbeing workshops, the work around menopause awareness and the successful management development courses.

The Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead provided an overview of the highlights of the key performance indicators. She noted that there had been good performance with 28 of the 36 indicators meeting or exceeding targets. A number of the street cleansing indicators had missed their targets and were challenging to meet. A number of changes would be implemented in the next quarter, including more challenging targets for waste and recycling and new targets for leisure centre usage. Other areas with challenges were delivery of affordable homes and the number of households in temporary

accommodation.

Discussing the report, the committee focused on the following areas:

- The number of statutory homeless was lower than the previous quarter, which was surprising given the cost of living. Officers noted that there was often a delay in these wider issues resulting in homelessness but further details would be sought from the housing team. The definition of statutory homeless was complex, depending, for example, in which council area a person became homeless.
- The funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund was welcome but the current allocation represented a small portion of the overall project. Ongoing discussions were very positive and Watford's community and diversity made it an exciting place to invest.
- The impact of the economy being increasingly cashless on those who were fleeing domestic abuse situations and needed to access services without being tracked.
- The reasons for the spike in households in temporary accommodation and the delay in developments being completed. The planning powers in relation to this were limited. The economic climate had had an impact on a number of developers with several in administration locally which had delayed the speed of delivery. Delivery of housing was not consistent throughout quarters, which also affected figures; measuring over the longer term was more appropriate.
- The cost of living had affected council tax collection rates; the CAB provided support to encourage people to spread payments if they were struggling rather than missing payments. The target for the collection rate was based on the area and what was reasonable for the demographics and higher turnover of residents than other areas.
- The online Report It functionality for street cleansing issues was much improved and more communications to encourage people to use it would be welcome.
- Fly-posting was challenging to deal with and the target was contractual. If it was not removed quickly it could build up. There were a number of enforcement pathways which could be complex.
- The compatibility of all makes of electric cars with the local chargepoints.
- The new crematorium would be open to all and residents could choose whether to use it or West Herts Crematorium.
- The council's approach to agile working reduced the risk of staff attending the office when they were unwell and the

message was that if staff were ill they needed to take time to recover.

- The council followed the national terms and conditions as well as legislation in relation to sickness pay. The process to manage persistent absence was long and complex and there were trigger points within the relevant policy. The council's aim was to support employees to be healthy and able to undertake their role. In the case of staff with a health condition, each case was managed on its merits.
- The council's involvement with refugees. There was a hotel near Watford which housed Afghan refugees and there were approximately 70 Ukrainian arrivals living with sponsors or having now moved into the private rented sector and had employment. Refugees were not a big pressure but the impact could change once the hotels were closed and the government work on this was ongoing. It was requested that the KPI data did not deal with refugees who were homeless and other homeless separately.
- There was a discussion around the health needs of certain groups within Leggatts ward and the need to provide more support in managing their conditions. The Chair noted the issue and would raise it at Health Scrutiny Committee to do a deeper dive into how effectively health care was delivered to address health inequalities.

RESOLVED –

Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress updates within this report relating to:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
- the Organisational Development Strategy 2020-24 (Appendix B)
- the key performance indicator results for Quarter 4 of 2022/23 (Appendix C)

17

New scrutiny task group - Housing

The committee received a report of the Senior Democratic Services Officer. Introducing the report, she noted that the establishment of this task was a recommendation of this committee in February 2023. The intention was to focus on maintenance and the damp and mould work.

The following councillors had volunteered to participate:

- Councillor Khan (Chair)

- Councillor Hill
- Councillor Clarke-Taylor
- Councillor Grimston
- Councillor Devonish

The committee noted that it would be interesting to understand the average length of time for maintenance to be completed and how visits were required.

Damp and mould was a serious issue for residents and a previous task group on this area had been an example of good practice.

Other councillors were able to attend the task group meetings as well as provide questions to task group meetings. Members had been advised that any member who was a current tenant of social rented properties would have a disclosable pecuniary interest and therefore would not be able to be a member of the group.

RESOLVED –

1. that the committee establishes a task group to consider the areas set out in the scope.
2. that the task group be comprised of the following members:
Councillor Khan (Chair), Councillor Hill, Councillor Clarke-Taylor, Councillor Grimston and Councillor Devonish.
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The scrutiny committee was invited to review the current Executive Decision Progress Report for 2023-24 and consider whether any further information was required.

RESOLVED –

that the current 2023/24 Executive Decision Progress report be noted.

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

The Chair, as the council's appointed representative on Hertfordshire County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee, noted that she had been unable to attend the meeting earlier that day. The next meeting would be on 12 October 2023.

20 **Work Programme**

Members were invited to review Overview and Scrutiny Committee's draft work programme for 2023/24.

At the September meeting, it was agreed that the focused item would look at street cleansing and waste and recycling. The committee also discussed staffing issues at the contractor.

RESOLVED –

That the Chair works with officers to incorporate members' suggestions into the 2023/24 work programme.

21 **Date of Next Meeting**

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RESOLVED –

That the Chair works with officers to incorporate members' suggestions into the 2023/24 work programme.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm
and finished at 8.35 pm