

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 September 2023

Present: Councillor A Grimston (Chair)
Councillor F Ezeifedi (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Ahmed, M Devonish, P Hill, A Khan, P Kloss,
T Osborn and K Rodrigues (Withdrew for the part of item 5
where he had an interest.)

Also present: Councillor Rabi Martins
David Birley, Waste Aware (minute numbers 22 to 24 and 26
to 28)
Bev Knight, Veolia (minute numbers 22 to 24 and 26 to 28)
Alex Murray, W3RT (minute numbers 22 to 24 and 26)
Steph Sykes, Citizens Advice (minute numbers 22 to 24 and
26)
Guy Miller, Elim Church (minute numbers 22 to 24 and 26)

Officers: Director of Performance
Senior Democratic Services Officer

22 **Apologies for Absence/Committee Membership**

There were no apologies for absence from the committee.

The Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Councillor Williams, sent his apologies.

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

The Chair disclosed that she was employed by W3RT and would withdraw from the room when they were under discussion in item 26.

Councillor Rodrigues disclosed that he had an interest in Citizens' Advice and would withdraw from the room when they were under discussion in item 26.

24 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 were submitted and signed.

25

Other scrutiny meetings - minutes

The Chair of Finance Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Khan, updated the committee on the meeting that had taken place on 12 September 2023. He highlighted the variance of £3 million and that the economic impact reserves had been used. The situation was challenging and budgets and in-year savings were being reviewed. The other major area for discussion was the proposed increases to fees and charges to be brought in in January 2024 to raise an additional £30K.

The minutes were available on the council's website.

26

Response to the cost-of-living crisis

The committee received presentations from several organisations involved in responding to the cost-of-living crisis: Watford Citizens' Advice, Watford and Three Rivers Trust (W3RT) and Elim Church.

The Director of Performance introduced the report highlighting that the Cost-of-Living Forum had been convened by the Mayor to oversee the local response. Watford had a strong and effective voluntary and community sector who delivered for the town.

Councillor Rodrigues withdrew from the meeting.

The committee received a presentation from Steph Sykes, Watford Citizens' Advice (CA). The presentation covered an overview of the service, how CA had unlocked financial and other benefits to residents, issues faced by clients over the last 12 months, which groups were disproportionately impacted, the anticipated areas of pressure for the next 12 months and how they were working in partnership.

During the course of the discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- All charities were under pressure for funding which required a strategic approach to opportunities. There was also a wider issue around maintaining the volunteering resource.
- CA's data, which showed that single mothers, those with disabilities and ethnic minorities were most impacted by the crisis, was consistent with data from across the country. There were no clear answers about why these groups were overrepresented and others were underrepresented.
- Discussions were ongoing with the council and Watford Community Housing about communicating debt advice early to those in arrears to prevent people getting into debt and to identify vulnerabilities.

- Many of those struggling with costs were in employment. CA were aware of the importance of using positive language and it was humbling to hear people's stories. CA remained a politically neutral organisation.
- There was no clear pattern to which bills were missed first, it depended on individual circumstances. The key message was to seek support as soon as possible. CA ran national campaigns around structural issues which impacted debt.
- One of the key outcomes of the recent survey among households was to encourage joined-up communications across organisations. This was particularly challenging for digitally isolated households. Information was disseminated to housing associations and community centres as well as information in About Watford and on the digital display boards in the town.

Councillor Rodrigues returned to the meeting.

Pastor Guy Miller of Elim Church, which ran Manna Foodbank, gave a presentation to the committee. The key highlights were:

- The foodbank fed 3,398 families last year and a number of families came on Sundays for a hot meal.
- They were supported by a number of companies which provided goods to distribute, this was challenging when companies could no longer assist.
- They saw people in significant financial hardship who could not afford to eat for days at a time.
- It was anticipated that needs would increase over the coming months and the team did what they could to help those struggling.
- The foodbank was self-funding, with occasional grants and valuable volunteer support.

During the course of the discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- Food donations were the most valuable donation and supermarkets did provide support as part of their aim to cut food waste.
- It was usually the same families who came for a meal on Sundays, although new people also benefitted.

The Chair then withdrew from the meeting; the Vice Chair chaired the meeting.

The committee welcomed Alex Murray of W3RT to the meeting who made a presentation about their role in supporting the voluntary sector. The key highlights were:

- W3RT's role was to support other organisations. This included allocating the household support fund where a diverse group of organisations benefitted.
- Grants remained competitive and the Asda fund and the National Lottery were likely to be valuable sources of funding.

- Supermarkets did provide food donations, but often it was bread and seldom fresh fruit.
- W3RT supported organisations in diversifying their volunteer base.

During the course of the discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- There was a free funding database on the W3RT website.
- It was important for people to seek advice early and to be wary of which organisations were giving advice.
- The CA's cost of living survey report provided areas of recommended actions on local and national scales to enable political support.
- A lack of digital connectivity hindered support and the council was undertaking a digital inclusion project with W3RT.

The committee discussed conclusions and recommendations. Members were keen to see more good news stories about money saved for families to demonstrate the impact on individuals and for the town; this could encourage more people to seek support and groups to participate in initiatives or apply for grants. An emerging theme was the impact of sharing data, communications and other opportunities to collaborate. The committee underlined the importance of seeking advice early from reputable organisations.

RESOLVED –

that the committee's conclusions and requested actions be taken forward.

The Chair then returned to the meeting and resumed chairing.

27

Focusing on Delivery: Performance and Progress Report

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

The Director of Performance introduced the report, she noted that this was quarter 1 and was therefore in the early days of delivery of the Council and Delivery Plans and the key performance indicators. The report also included updates on the delivery of key strategies.

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 key performance indicator results for Quarter 1 of 2023/24 (Appendix B)
- the council's key corporate strategies (Appendix C)

28

Spotlight on service delivery - waste and recycling

The committee received a presentation from the Waste, Recycling and Market Leads which covered; waste and recycling target results, how Watford compared with the rest of Hertfordshire, the factors within the council's control (including collection methodology, operational effectiveness and communications), the factors outside the council's control (including climate, demographics and legislation), the impact of rurality and deprivation and educational and communications outreach activities.

The committee then received a presentation of David Birley, Waste Aware Co-Ordinator. The key points highlighted were:

- Waste Aware was a coalition of all 10 Hertfordshire district and boroughs and Hertfordshire County Council.
- Over half of all waste was recycled and most residual waste was sent to the energy from waste plants and this would be all residual waste in a couple of years so there would be none going to landfill.
- Garden waste was sent to an open windrow composting site and used in agriculture and landscaping. In-vessel composting was used for mixed garden and food waste. Food from separate food waste collections was sent to anaerobic digestion from which methane was derived to power electrical generators.
- Dry recycling materials were separated and sent to secondary processing plants, mostly in the UK. Plastics were mostly processed in the UK but some materials, especially card was sent to the Far East where it was used in packaging new products.

The committee received a final presentation from Bev Knight, Veolia, on the food waste collection service in flats. The key points highlighted were:

- Food waste constituted 30% of residual waste and collections had been available for any new build flats since the service change but were not initially available in those built prior to September 2020. There would be an increased offering going forward where managing agents had opted in.
- Landlords and managing agents had been contacted and sites were being surveyed for suitability. Kitchen caddies, liners and information on how to use the service would be delivered in October for the first tranche.
- They would also deliver wheelie bins to bin stores and posters to advise residents on how to use the service.

- Veolia were working closely with Watford Community Housing with a view to adding the food waste service to suitable sites in the future.

During the course of the discussions, the following points were highlighted:

- Practical considerations and economics made kerbside collections of soft plastics difficult but there were collection points at supermarkets.
- Delays in particular government initiatives, including extended producer responsibility, were impacting local government decision making.
- Food waste was collected weekly; one week with garden waste and the following week separately. These were treated differently and was in part due to the chargeable garden waste service and was a cost-saving measure. Contracts for the disposal of garden waste and food waste were being procured by Hertfordshire County Council
- Where residents' residual bins were overfull, the crews left a tag and this provided an opportunity to educate on what could be recycled. The crews knew which households repeatedly overfilled their bins. Excess recycling was taken as long as the material has been correctly sorted.
- The pricing levels for recycling materials fluctuated and was negative at present but should increase as the economy stabilised.
- Food waste bins for flatted developments would be similar to other residential receptacles and should not be susceptible to foxes. Caddies would be left in bin stores for collection, where appropriate.
- Communications should reflect that elderly residents might need additional support in collecting their food caddy.
- Planning issues around processing plants within Hertfordshire tended to relate to lorry movements and particulate emissions.
- There were textile banks available near the library and on the Meriden estate and clothes could also be taken to charity shops.
- Residents could purchase an additional sack for occasional excess waste and additional recycling would also be collected.
- Fly-tipping in other areas would not be collected by the crews as this was a different category of waste which might require investigation by enforcement teams and presented operational issues.

RESOLVED –

that the updates and actions be noted.

29

Call-in

No call-in had been received.

30 **Executive Decision Progress Report**

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.

31 **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 the next meeting would be on 12 October 2023.

32 **Work Programme**

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

RESOLVED –

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

33 **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be on Wednesday 18 October.

The committee recorded their thanks to Councillor Rodrigues for his contributions as he would be taking on the role of portfolio holder on 1 October.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 9.15 pm