



# **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Wednesday, 25th July, 2012**

**7.00 pm**

**Town Hall, Watford**

**Publication date: 17 July 2012**

**CONTACT**

If you require further information or you would like a copy of this agenda in another format, e.g. large print, please contact Sandra Hancock in Legal and Property Services on 01923 278377 or by email to [legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk](mailto:legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk) .

Welcome to this meeting. We hope you find these notes useful.

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# COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Councillor K Collett (Chair)

Councillor A Khan (Vice-Chair)

Councillors J Aron, N Bell, S Greenslade, K Hastrick, M Hofman, R Martins and S Rackett

## AGENDA

### PART A - OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

**2. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)**

**3. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2012 to be submitted and signed. *(All minutes are available on the Council's website.)*

**4. MINUTES - BUDGET PANEL AND COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP** (Pages 1 - 6)

To note the minutes of the following meeting –

- Budget Panel 12 June 2012

**5. CALL-IN**

To consider any Executive decisions which have been called in by the requisite number of Members.

**6. OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS** (Pages 7 - 12)

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the outstanding actions and questions from previous meetings.

**7. FORWARD PLAN** (Pages 13 - 16)

In accordance with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's terms of reference, Members are asked to review the changes to the Forward Plan since its last meeting.

**8. PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE: CHOICE BASED LETTINGS** (Pages 17 - 22)

The appendix to this report includes the latest update on the recommendations of the Choice Based Lettings Review.

**9. PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE - NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS TASK GROUP**  
(Pages 23 - 32)

The Appendix to this report includes the latest update on the recommendations included in the Neighbourhood Forums Task Group's report.

**10. TASK GROUP UPDATE**

There have been no Task Group meetings since Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 20 June 2012.

**11. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Wednesday 19 September 2012
- Wednesday 3 October 2012 (call-in only)
- Thursday 18 October 2012 (call-in only)

## BUDGET PANEL

12 June 2012

Present: Councillor Dhindsa (Chair)  
Councillor Rackett (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors Derbyshire, Greenslade, Jeffree, Khan, Martins and Taylor

Also present: Councillor Watkin, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services  
Councillor Meerabux

Officers: Head of Strategic Finance  
Head of Finance Shared Services  
Head of Revenues and Benefits (Shared Services)  
Economic Development and Infrastructure Planner  
Interim Housing Strategy Manager  
Revenues Manager (Shared Services)  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

### 1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Aron.

### 2. **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

During the discussion in minute number 5 the Chair, Councillor Dhindsa, informed the Panel that he owned properties which were rented to tenants and it was possible they may be affected by the new scheme. He stated that if Members preferred him not to take part in the discussion he would withdraw from the meeting.

The Panel had no objection to Councillor Dhindsa remaining in the meeting and taking part in the discussion.

### 3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2012 were submitted and signed.

### 4. **BUSINESS RATES RETENTION**

The Panel received a report of the Head of Strategic Finance which followed on from a previous report to Budget Panel on 25 October 2011. Additional documents were circulated to the Panel after the publication of the agenda. These included a document from the Economic Development and Infrastructure Planner regarding the potential for Business Rate growth in Watford and one about the projection for New Homes Bonus from the Interim Housing Strategy Manager. The Head of Strategic Finance apologised that the additional

information had not been provided earlier, however, the situation was changing on a daily basis.

The Chair introduced Neil Benn from CIPFA and invited him to give his presentation.

Mr Benn explained the current Business Rates collection procedures and the new scheme from April 2013. He provided a comparison of Watford Business Rates under the old scheme and the new scheme. He added that levies would be imposed on authorities who gained Business Rates and safety nets for those who collected less. He also provided an example of the calculation for 2013-14. The figures included in the example were guesstimates.

Following a question from Councillor Watkin, the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Shared Services, Mr Benn confirmed that the targets were set for 10 years. The option on how the target would be calculated still needed to be confirmed. It was possible this could change if there were a change of government.

Mr Benn advised that there were many aspects of the scheme that still needed to be finalised. The proposed levy for gainers in the scheme was 89%. A proportion of the levy would then be distributed to authorities who had made losses.

Mr Benn then explained about 'pooling'. This would allow local authorities to 'pool' their resources. He informed Members about the advantages, disadvantages and main risks of this method. He added that if authorities wanted to form a 'pool' they had to inform the Department for Communities and Local Government by the end of July 2012. If the County Council was involved the levy was reduced to 73% rather than 89%.

Mr Benn set out the timetable for the introduction of the scheme culminating with it being introduced from April 2013.

Members were concerned that once the target was set there was no incentive to increase the amount of business rates collected. Councils might prefer to have flats developed rather than businesses and thereby gaining additional New Homes Bonus.

There was also concern that there might be tension finding like-minded authorities to join forces and pool resources. It was felt that there were very few authorities in Hertfordshire who were similar to Watford. Some Members felt that 'pooling' should not be ruled out completely and that further work needed to take place to enable different options to be investigated. It was agreed that there was insufficient time to make a decision before the deadline in July.

Following various Members' questions, Mr Benn explained that the July deadline had been set to enable central government time to work out the targets and grants for 2013/14. If authorities decided not to enter into a 'pool' by July it was possible to establish one at a later date for the following year.

With regard to the incentives, Mr Benn advised that the Government wanted no more than 1% increase in Business Rates per year and therefore the levy had been introduced.

The Economic Development and Infrastructure Planner explained the document he had produced setting out the potential for Business Rate Growth. In relation to 'pooling' a concern would be that not all authorities were pro-growth. Authorities interested in 'pooling' needed to be like-minded and have a common ground. He noted that Members had referred to Stevenage and Dacorum. The businesses within Dacorum were different to those in Watford. With regard to Stevenage, the town was located further north and land values were different.

The Head of Strategic Finance then informed Members of the discussion which had taken place at the Herts Leaders' meeting on 11 June. He advised that the Mayor had not been present as she was attending a different meeting. He stated that the Leaders had agreed not to make an application to 'pool' resources by the July deadline and that it would be reviewed further after December when more information would be available.

The Chair concluded from the Panel's discussion that Members felt that the suggestion should not be ruled out completely but that it was important to wait for further information. This appeared to be the same view as the Herts Leaders' group.

The Chair thanked Neil Benn for his presentation and responding to the Panel's questions.

The Head of Strategic Finance noted that the New Homes Bonus had not been discussed. He advised that this would be revisited at the next meeting as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Panel's comments be noted and that 'pooling' should not be ruled out completely.
2. that further information be presented to Budget Panel when it is known.

ACTION: Head of Strategic Finance

## 5. **LOCALISATION OF SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX**

The Panel received a report of the Head of Revenues and Benefits which provided an update on the progress in devising a local scheme to support Council Tax payers. An additional document had been circulated to Members following the publication of the agenda which set out the consultation proposals.

The Chair informed the Panel that he owned property which was rented out to tenants and that they might be affected by a new scheme. He stated that he was not personally affected. He asked Members if they were content for him to remain at the meeting or whether he should withdraw.

The Panel agreed that the Chair could remain and take part in the discussion.

Members discussed the suggested changes to the discounts and exemptions that the Council might be able to introduce. It was suggested that a taper might be set as it would not be sensible if the administration costs outweighed the expected income. Members agreed that any removal of exemptions or discounts may help to get properties rented or sold. The Panel was generally in favour of maximising these options.

Councillor Rackett suggested that the Council also needed to consider how it could help landlords to ensure their properties were let, for example providing contacts with social landlords.

Councillor Meerabux commented that it was important to allow landlords time to get properties back into decent order. He was concerned that people might be encouraged to leave properties to become 'shoddy'.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits (Shared Services) replied that the theory was that the time properties were empty would be reduced. Housing would welcome landlords putting their properties forward for use. He advised that some landlords, however, did not like renting their property to people in receipt of benefits. Revenues and Benefits did not hold information about why properties were empty. The service was only aware if they were empty and unfurnished or undergoing major repair works.

The Panel also discussed the various options for changes to the scheme which would affect those in receipt of Council Tax Benefits. They were concerned about the impact on this vulnerable sector of the community. The responsibility for achieving the required savings should be placed on the empty properties. It was felt that the Equality Impact Assessment had an important role in determining the right procedure. Members also believed that it was important to see the result of the consultation with the current recipients and vulnerable groups.

The Head of Revenues and Benefits (Shared Services) advised Members that the interim consultation report would be presented to Budget Panel in October.

Councillor Derbyshire stated that it was difficult to make any firm decision as there was insufficient information available. He suggested that a table could be produced to show the comparisons between the current and proposed schemes.

Members also referred to the suggestion of a countywide scheme. It was agreed that it was difficult to give a definitive answer. Councillor Martins said that his concern with a countywide scheme was that Watford had a different demographic and different deprivation levels to the rest of the county.

The Head of Strategic Finance reminded Members that Watford would need to find 16% of the overall required savings, which could, as a last resort, be covered by using available reserves if agreed by Members. The County Council, however may not have that luxury. It would have to identify £588,000 of compensating savings and might feasibly decide to reduce expenditure in Watford in order to claw back the savings it needed to find. Watford therefore could not be complacent.

The Head of Strategic Finance then outlined the discussions from the Herts



Leaders' meeting the previous evening. He added that officers from across the County would be meeting on 18 June to discuss a countywide scheme. A report would then be presented to the Leaders' meeting in July.

The Chair thanked the Head of Revenues and Benefits (Shared Services) for attending and answering Members' questions.

RESOLVED –

that the Panel's comments be noted.

## 6. **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Panel received a report of the Head of Legal and Property Services including the latest draft of the rolling work programme.

The Chair suggested that a training session could be held at the beginning of the next meeting. Due to the number of reports he asked Members whether they would be prepared to start at 6.30 p.m. This was agreed.

Councillor Rackett asked whether it would be possible to include an item about the feasibility of carrying out consultation on the draft budget. This was agreed.

Councillor Martins asked that the report on Controlled Parking Zone permit charges included a section for discussion about the enforcement periods across the Borough and flexibility in the scheme. The Chair added that it should include the possibility of introducing some free parking times.

In concluding the meeting, The Chair requested that the Head of Strategic Finance pass on the Budget Panel's thanks to all officers and Neil Benn (the consultant) for their contributions to the agenda items.

RESOLVED –

that the Panel's comments be included in the 2012/13 work programme.

## 7. **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Tuesday 11 September 2012 (starting at 6.30 p.m.)
- Tuesday 23 October 2012
- Tuesday 27 November 2012

Chair  
Budget Panel

The meeting started at 7.00 p.m.  
and finished at 9.05 p.m.

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## Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Outstanding Actions and questions

Action to be carried out		Responsibility	Committee Date	Deadline	Comments/officer
<b>Outstanding Actions</b>					
OA 6	An update on the Benefits service to be presented to OSC in the Autumn	Committee and Scrutiny Officer and Head of Revenues and Benefits	2 February 2012	19 September 2012	Added to rolling work programme
<b>Performance Report</b>					
PI 21	Will the Council require funding over the additional £150,000 already allocated to cover the cost of placing people in bed and breakfast?	Partnerships and Performance Section Head	20 June 2012	19 September 2012	
PI 22	Members to review the list of performance indicators for 2012/13 and consider any suggestions for inclusion in future reports.	Overview and Scrutiny Committee members	20 June 2012	1 August 2012	
<b>Voluntary Sector Task Group</b>					
VS 1	The recommendations to be reviewed once the review of current priorities has been completed.	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	23 June 2011	July 2012	To be carried out in September

Action to be carried out	Responsibility	Committee Date	Deadline	Comments/officer	
<b>Affordable Housing Review</b>					
AHR 1	<u>Recommendation 1 – Affordable Housing threshold</u> – The status of the Core Strategy to be reviewed in 12 months.	OSC Committee	26 July 2011	July 2012	To be carried out in September
AHR 6	Recommendations 3 (Band E applicants) and 4 (Partnership working) – to be further reviewed	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	20 June 2012	To be confirmed	Committee and Scrutiny Officer to liaise with officers on timing of the review.
<b>Work Programme and Task Groups</b>					
WP 8	Community Safety Partnership Task Group to be asked to review the provision of drug treatment in the borough	Committee and Scrutiny Officer and Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer	24 November 2011	1 December 2011  Revised date TBC	Referred to the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer supporting the Community Safety Partnership Task Group.  Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be informed when the subject is due to be discussed at the Task Group.
WP 11	OSC to examine the long-term impact on the four organisations which would be subject to the largest grant cuts.	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	2 February 2012	To be confirmed	Awaiting advice from Community Services regarding the appropriate timing of the review.
<b>Property Services Leases for Voluntary Sector</b>					
PSL 1	A draft Property Policy review scope to be drawn up.	Chair and Vice-Chair of Overview and	26 July 2011		The Head of Legal and Property Services advises that the Draft Commissioning Framework would take

Action to be carried out	Responsibility	Committee Date	Deadline	Comments/officer
	Scrutiny			<p>into account the policy regarding property leased to the voluntary sector.</p> <p>Following a request at the meeting on 20 June the Committee and Scrutiny Officer emailed the Head of Legal and Property Services for a further update on 10 July 2012. The Head of Legal and Property Services responded –</p> <p>"Councillor Sharpe recently gave Portfolio Holder approval to looking at disposal of our Rent to Mortgage Portfolio for best consideration. We will now be progressing that.</p> <p>The Property Section Head is to prepare a timetable on the progression of the work.</p> <p>Cabinet agreed on 18 June to abandon the OJEU procurement of a development partner for Charter Place and enter into a lease with Capital Shopping Centres. The property team have been working on the Charter Place redevelopment project and this has taken up a number of officers' time almost to the exclusion of other work and is ongoing.</p> <p>Negotiations are continuing with the leaseholders who wish to redevelop the</p>

Action to be carried out		Responsibility	Committee Date	Deadline	Comments/officer
					<p>Ascot Road site to regear the lease.</p> <p>Extensive property work is also ongoing for Croxley Rail Link and the Health Campus.</p> <p>We did dispose of the Gammons Farm site to an RSL for £910,000 which they will develop out for affordable housing.</p>
<b>Hospital Parking Charges Task Group</b>					
HP 6	Review outcome of report	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	2 February 2012	7 September 2012	Added to rolling work programme
<b>Previous Reviews Updates</b>					
PR 1	<p><u>Services for the Deceased</u></p> <p>Contact Community Services to request further information.</p>	Chair of OSC (Cllr Watkin)	2 February 2012	24 February 2012	<p>Still awaiting further information</p> <p>Councillor Watkin emailed the Parks and Open Spaces Section Head on 20 June. At the time of completing this update there has been no reply.</p>
<b>Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel</b>					
OS 1	Write to all Councillors who had expressed an interest in taking part in the new Panel.	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	20 June 2012	15 August 2012	
OS 2	Set up the first meeting of the new Scrutiny Panel	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	20 June 2012	15 August 2012	

Action to be carried out		Responsibility	Committee Date	Deadline	Comments/officer
OS 3	Contact the Managing Director to ask whether the new Scrutiny Panel would be involved prior to contracts being awarded.	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	20 June 2012	15 August 2012	
<b>Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework Task Group</b>					
VCF 1	The draft commissioning Framework to be circulated to all Councillors	Committee and Scrutiny Officer	20 June 2012	15 July 2012	All Members were emailed the link to the consultation on the Commissioning Framework on the Council's website.

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## \*PART A

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date of meeting:** 25 July 2012  
**Report of:** Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
**Title:** Forward Plan

### 1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out the changes to the latest Forward Plan when compared to the information presented at the last meeting in June.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviews the Forward Plan and considers whether there are any items it wishes to review further.

#### **Contact Officer:**

For further information on this report please contact: Sandra Hancock,  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
telephone extension: 8377 email: [legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk](mailto:legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk)

**Report approved by:** Carol Chen, Head of Legal and Property Services

### 3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Under the Local Government Act 2000, the Council is required to publish a Forward Plan of key decisions it is proposed will be taken within the next four months.
- 3.2 The Forward Plan indicates the nature of the key decision proposed; the contact officer; the proposed decision maker and those people and organisations who have been consulted.

### 3.3 New additions to the Forward Plan since the meeting held on 20 June

There are six items which have been added to the Forward Plan since the information published in the Scrutiny Committee's report for the meeting on 20 June.

- Approval of recommendation to allocate £460,000 to relocate CCTV to Shady Lane – for consideration by Cabinet in July. (See *paragraph 3.5*)
- Property Review – for consideration by the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Legal and Property Services in August.
- Agree the draft local council tax benefit scheme for consultation – for consideration by the Mayor before August 2012.
- Approval of the Voluntary and Community Sector Commissioning Framework 2013-16 – for consideration by Cabinet in October 2012.
- Award of contract to manage and maintain the Council's hostels and managed properties from 1 April 2013 – for consideration by Cabinet in December 2012.

### 3.4 Amendments to the Forward Plan since the June – September 2012 edition (issued 17 May 2012)

There has been one amendment to an item in the Forward Plan since the information published in the Scrutiny Committee's report for the meeting held on 20 June 2012.

- Property Review – originally the decision was due to be taken in June but was finally considered in July. (See *paragraph 3.5*)

### 3.5 Deletions from the Forward Plan

There have been nine deletions from the Forward Plan since the last meeting.

- Charter Place re-development – considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 June 2012.
- Watford Health Campus Update – considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 June 2012.
- Review the outcome of the Sports Facilities Study and agree consultation and feasibility proposals to support the development of a Sports Facilities Strategy – considered by Cabinet at its meeting

on 18 June 2012.

- Adoption of the Framework and 5 year Action Plan for allotments across the Borough – considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 18 June 2012.
- Approval of procurement tenders for telecoms – delegated decision taken by the Head of Strategic Finance and the Contract Procurement Manager in June 2012.
- Property Review – delegated decision taken by the Portfolio Holder for Legal and Property and Planning on 9 July 2012.
- Approval of recommendation to allocate £460,000 to relocate CCTV to Shady Lane – considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2012.
- Service specification, performance standards and evaluation criteria for the service redesign of waste and recycling, street cleansing and parks and open spaces – considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 9 July 2012.

#### 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 Whilst a number of reports considered by the Scrutiny Committee will have had financial implications, the scrutiny role in itself, should result in no additional external costs being incurred.

##### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Head of Legal and Property Services comments that if Overview and Scrutiny wish to consider any proposed decision it needs to be mindful of when it is proposed that the decision be taken and ensure that it has completed its work prior to that time in order to be able to contribute to the decision maker's deliberations.

## Appendices

None

## Background Papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

June and July 2012 editions of the Watford Borough Council Forward Plan

## File Reference

None

## \*PART A

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date of meeting:** 25 July 2012  
**Report of:** Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
**Title:** Previous Review Update: Choice Based Lettings

### 1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the recommendations of the Choice Based Lettings Review carried out by Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee in 2010/11.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the latest update and considers whether the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations have been met.

#### **Contact Officer:**

For further information on this report please contact: Sandra Hancock,  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
telephone extension: 8377 email: [legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk](mailto:legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk)

#### **Report approved by:**

### 3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of Choice Based Lettings during two meetings in October and November 2010.
- 3.2 The final report incorporating the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations and the responses of officers was agreed at the meeting held on 3 February 2011.
- 3.3 The Scrutiny Committee resolved that the final report should be forwarded to the Portfolio Holder and then on to Cabinet.
- 3.4 During the preparation of this report the Committee and Scrutiny Officer has discovered that unfortunately during the change over to the new scrutiny structures this action was overlooked and the report was not forwarded to the

Portfolio Holder or Cabinet.

- 3.5 The recommendations and officers' original responses were forwarded to Community Services and officers were asked to provide an update. The Mayor, as Portfolio Holder for Housing was copied into this update request. The officers' response is shown at Appendix 1.
- 3.6 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the responses and consider whether it wishes to follow up the recommendations at a later date or it considers them to have been completed.

#### 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 There are no financial implications, as any costs should be met from WBC's contribution to the Countywide partnership scheme, which TRDC administers.

##### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 The Head of Legal and Property Services comments that there are no legal implications in this report.

#### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Choice Based Lettings update

#### Background Papers

Choice Based Lettings Review final report  
Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee minutes 3 February 2011

#### File Reference

None

<b>Review: Choice Based Lettings</b>
<b>Committee/Task Group: Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Final report published: 3 February 2011</b>
<b>Cabinet/Executive or Officer response: Officer response (included in final report)</b>
<b>Chair: Councillor Steve Rackett</b>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Cabinet/Executive/Officer response/decision</b>	<b>Scrutiny follow-up</b>	<b>Latest update</b>	<b>Further review required / completed</b>
(1) Training courses for long term non-bidders especially relation to IT.	We already contact people in housing need who are not bidding to find out the reasons for this and they can be assisted by staff in the CSC or Housing officers, we also run regular training for support agencies e.g. hostel providers so that they can support their clients. <i>(Officer response)</i>	Housing department to be asked to provide evidence of effective training and follow up.	Practice of contacting non bidders in the higher bands will be incorporated into the new procedures of the Demand Team. This could usefully take place at the same time as a spot check of banding.	
(2) Explanations and education for bidders and potential bidders about the banding system.	See above, also a scheme guide is issued when people register. <i>(officer response)</i>	Housing department to be asked to provide evidence of effective training and follow up.	Provided on Herts Choice Homes website which our website has a link to.	

Recommendation	Cabinet/Executive/Officer response/decision	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(3) Provide information about, and ensure access to the appeals procedure.	Yes this is something we could improve. <i>(Officer response)</i>	Review in 12 months	This is included in the nomination policy. Will be considered as part of reviewing our web pages.	
(4) A spot check on a sample of applicants to ensure they are in the correct band and provide feedback on results to the scrutiny committee.	Yes this should be in place. <i>(Officer response)</i>	Review in 12 months	This will be incorporated into new procedures and will come under the remit of the Housing Casework Co-ordinator (new post) and also part of the audit plan being developed with internal audit.	
(5) Tailored letters should be initiated and also 'follow-ups' for unsuccessful bidders.	We need to take a view on how resource intensive this would be; our overall approach is to move away from letters due to the cost involved. Unsuccessful bidders can access feedback e.g. number of people bidding for the property they were interested in, which band the successful bidder was in etc. <i>(Officer response)</i>	Review in 12 months	Feedback is already available via Herts Choice Homes. Tailored letters will not be possible to resource.	



Recommendation	Cabinet/Executive/Officer response/decision	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(6) Investigate the schemes on Freeview and Wii pioneered by Kirklees Council.	Freeview is not compatible with the process, only packages that clients would need to pay for, e.g. Sky. <i>(Officer response)</i>	The Committee has information which suggests that users do not need to pay services such as Sky. Scrutiny Officer to follow up with Housing Officers. Review in 12 months	Not progressing at present, not a priority area for the service.	
(7) Council Tax cost to be displayed with house information on property listings.	Yes <i>(Officer response)</i>	Review in 12 months	This has been requested and is with housing providers to arrange. We are working with WCHT on this.	
(8) Obtain feedback from successful and unsuccessful bidders.	There is a user group which includes people who are still waiting to be re-housed. <i>(Officer response)</i>	Scrutiny Officers to follow up analysis of feedback. Review in 12 months	User group continues.	
(9) More work to be focused on the benefits of moving from under occupied properties (for example smaller utility bills).	For maximum impact, this work would need to be focused within our RSL partners although we could support any initiatives they bring forward. <i>(Officer response)</i>	The Committee Chair agreed to follow this up and report back to the Committee.	Underoccupation is a priority and we have revised our nomination policy to give additional priority to those underoccupying by one bedroom (on a par with those in larger properties). Intensive focus on casework in the light of welfare reform "bedroom tax"	

Recommendation	Cabinet/Executive/Officer response/decision	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(10) Staff to be alert to people who may have difficulty in filling in the forms.	This is already part of our daily working practice. <i>(Officer response)</i>		Previous comments apply.	

## \*PART A

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date of meeting:** 25 July 2012  
**Report of:** Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
**Title:** Previous Review Update: Neighbourhood Forums Task Group

### 1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides an update on the recommendations of the Neighbourhood Forums Task Group in 2010/11.

### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 that Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the latest update and considers whether the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations have been met.

#### **Contact Officer:**

For further information on this report please contact: Sandra Hancock,  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer  
telephone extension: 8377 email: [legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk](mailto:legalanddemocratic@watford.gov.uk)

#### **Report approved by:**

### 3.0 DETAILED PROPOSAL

3.1 The Constitution Working Party, at its meeting on 25 June 2009, asked the Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee to review the system of Neighbourhood Forums that had been in operation since 2008.

3.2 Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a Task Group, which held four meetings between December 2010 and February 2011.

3.3 The Task Group presented its final report to Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee on 9 March 2011. The Scrutiny Committee endorsed the report and recommendations and asked for them to be forwarded to Policy Development Scrutiny Committee and then on to Constitution Working Party.

- 3.4 Policy Development Scrutiny Committee reviewed the report and endorsed its content.
- 3.5 Constitution Working Party reviewed the report and recommendations at its meeting on 30 March 2011. The Working Party commented on the recommendations and asked that the report was forwarded to Council.
- 3.6 Whilst preparing this report the Committee and Scrutiny Officer has discovered that the report and its recommendations were not forwarded to Council.
- 3.7 Officers have completed the latest update. There are three recommendations (8, 9 and 10) which are recommendations aimed at Members. The Scrutiny Committee is asked for any feedback it can provide for these recommendations.
- 3.8 Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to review the latest update and consider if any further action needs to be taken.

#### 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

##### 4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 Any financial implications in this report should be met from existing budgets.

##### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

- 4.2.1 *The Head of Legal and Property Services comments that there are no legal implications in this report.*

#### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Neighbourhood Forums Task Group update

#### Background Papers

Neighbourhood Forum Task Group final report  
Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee minutes 9 March 2011  
Policy Development Scrutiny Committee minutes 15 March 2011  
Constitution Working Party minutes 30 March 2011

#### File Reference

None

## Review Update

<b>Review: Neighbourhood Forums Review</b>
<b>Committee/Task Group: Neighbourhood Forums Task Group on behalf of Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Final report published: 9 March 2011</b>
<b>Cabinet/Executive response: Referred to Constitution Working Party on 30 March 2011</b>
<b>Chair: Councillor Kelly McLeod</b>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Constitution Working Party comments</b>	<b>Scrutiny follow-up</b>	<b>Latest update</b>	<b>Further review required / completed</b>
(1) In view of the mixed approach adopted by the wards, the name 'Community Engagement Fund' would be a more appropriate name than 'Neighbourhood Forums', which should only apply to the meetings held. The 'Community Engagement Fund' would be available for meetings or projects or a combination of the two.	<p>Recommendations endorsed by Working Party.</p> <p>The term 'Neighbourhood Forum' refers to the fact that they are based on individual wards.</p> <p>The fund can be known as Community Engagement Fund. <i>(Head of Legal and Property Services at meeting).</i></p>	None	<p>The funds can be used for projects and/or meetings. The Ward Councillors make this decision.</p> <p>Community Engagement Fund is used when referring to the budget for Neighbourhood Forums.</p>	

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(2) The Neighbourhood Forum system is valuable and all members should be encouraged to consider how to use Neighbourhood Forums ('Community Engagement Funds') to achieve greater community engagement in tackling issues in their ward.	Recommendation endorsed	None	In 2011/12 all wards used some or all of their budget for meetings and/or projects. The Annual report to Council on 18 July 2011 includes full details of expenditure.	
(3) That the non-prescriptive system which allows wards to choose a) whether meetings are appropriate for their wards and b) how the meetings are organised be retained.	Recommendation endorsed	None	<p>The Ward Councillors continue to decide whether to hold meetings within their wards and how to organise those meetings.</p> <p>A new guideline was produced in 2011 including information about the use of funds.</p> <p>New proforma were created in 2011 for the expenditure of the Community Engagement Fund for meetings or on projects.</p> <p>The new guidelines and proforma were circulated to all Councillors in 2011.</p>	

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Constitution Working Party comments</b>	<b>Scrutiny follow-up</b>	<b>Latest update</b>	<b>Further review required / completed</b>
(4) That the current system for project funding continue.	Recommendation endorsed	None	Each ward receives funding and can use it for meetings or projects. The current annual budget per ward is £2,500.	
(5) That councillors should return an annual report on their use of their Community Engagement Fund to Annual Council.	Recommendation endorsed	None	All wards are provided with a template and asked to complete the Annual report. The completed Annual Reports are then collated and presented to Council. The Annual Reports for 2011/12 were included on the agenda for Council on 18 July 2012.	

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
<p>(6) Further and ongoing training is needed for all members to embed the process and improve performance:</p> <p>Training should cover –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process for the use of Community Engagement Funds both at the induction for new members and periodically for other members</li> <li>• Chairing skills for large public meetings</li> <li>• Planning effective and productive agendas</li> <li>• Management of the budget and appropriate projects for funding.</li> </ul>	Recommendation endorsed	None	<p>The training needs were forwarded to the Member Development and Civic Officer.</p> <p>At new Members' Induction the Democratic Services Manager includes a section on Neighbourhood Forums. Copies of the proforma and guidelines are included in their packs.</p> <p>In March a scrutiny training session was held called 'Chairing for Scrutiny'. This would also have been suitable for any Member interested in chairing other meetings.</p> <p>Members receive regular updates from Democratic Services about their budget. The new guidelines include information about activities which are not suitable.</p>	



Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
<p>(7) That there should be an agreed protocol as follows for inviting officers to Neighbourhood Forums:</p> <p>a) To invite the relevant officer with at least two weeks' notice informing them of the topic and format of the meeting</p> <p>b) To provide the officer with a short briefing about the topic to allow officers to be fully prepared.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed.</p> <p>The Constitution Working Party commented that in some cases more than two weeks' notice might be more appropriate.</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The latest guidance states that the lead councillor is responsible for ensuring that officers and other representatives required at the meeting are notified of the date, time and venue of the meeting and what is expected of them. The notification of a meeting proforma includes a specific question in the checklist about this.</p>	
<p>(8) That twice a year each ward's councillors should contribute an update on their meetings and/or projects to a 'Community Engagement' round-up' feature in the council's About Watford magazine.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed – agreed that all Members should be given the opportunity to contribute an update on their meetings and projects.</p>	<p>None</p>		

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
(9) That Members be encouraged to contribute examples of good practice in their Community Engagement Fund to the monthly members' bulletin.	Recommendation endorsed	None	There have been no contributions to the Members' Bulletin.	
<p>(10) That each ward makes contact with the following local partners, as recommended by the report on Community and Neighbourhood Engagement, introducing themselves and making them aware of the opportunities to engage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• representatives of the County Council</li> <li>• representatives of the police/Community Safety Partnership</li> <li>• representatives of the fire service</li> <li>• representatives of the PCT (this might be a GPs' surgery at local level)</li> </ul>	Recommendation endorsed	None	<p>During 2011/12, those wards which have held meetings have invited officers from the Borough Council and County Council, representatives from the Police and in one case the Manager of a large supermarket in the area to discuss residents' concerns.</p> <p><i>It would be appreciated if Councillors can feedback further on this recommendation.</i></p>	

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• representatives of the LSP (as individuals or representing the Partnership)</li> <li>• chairs of residents' associations</li> <li>• representatives of local schools</li> <li>• representatives of churches and faith groups</li> <li>• representatives of youth groups</li> <li>• representatives of local traders</li> <li>• representatives of voluntary sector organisations active in wards.</li> </ul>				

Recommendation	Constitution Working Party comments	Scrutiny follow-up	Latest update	Further review required / completed
<p>(11) That the sections of the website which give details of the Community Engagement Funds and residents' associations should be made more prominent. Ward councillors should contact the council's communications team to update details of their local residents' associations on the website.</p>	<p>Recommendation endorsed</p>	<p>None</p>	<p>The Neighbourhood Forum web page is located on the Council's website as a link from the 'Meetings and Agendas' link on the home page.</p> <p>Each ward has its own page on the Neighbourhood Forum section. It includes details of the 3 Ward Councillors, dates of forthcoming meetings and the Annual Reports.</p> <p>Details of residents' associations are available on the Council's website.</p>	