

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 July 2011

Present: Councillor Watkin (Chair)
Councillor Rackett (Vice-Chair),
Councillors Bell, Greenslade (for minute numbers 15 – 22), Hastrick,
Jeffree, Martins and McLeod

Also present: Councillor Meerabux

Officer: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Johnson.

13. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

14. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2011 were submitted and signed.

15. **UPDATE FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Scrutiny Committee received an update on the actions and questions from the previous meeting. Members noted the actions and responses to the questions. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer apologised for the erratic numbering within the document.

3 and 4 – Fly tipping

The Chair noted the Head of Environmental Services' response to the questions regarding the increase in fly tipping. He did not feel there was sufficient evidence to warrant further investigation at the current time.

A Member commented that there was anecdotal evidence from residents in his ward, Central, that the situation was bad.

The Chair advised that the situation would be monitored through the regular performance reports received by the Scrutiny Committee.

6 and 7 – Communal recycling and new green bins

The Chair suggested that this should be reviewed further at the Scrutiny Committee's November meeting.

A Member noted that the new green bins did not allow residents to put green cuttings into them as the slits were too small.

8 – Town Centre recycling bins

The Chair suggested that this should be further reviewed at the November meeting.

10 – Sickness absence

A report prepared by the Head of Human Resources had been circulated prior to the meeting.

A Member suggested that information regarding long term sickness should be highlighted in the performance report. The Chair suggested that further explanation was required regarding the absence incidents and how the percentage was calculated.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

A Member noted the reduction in sickness levels and said that he was concerned that staff felt pressurised to attend work even when they were sick in case this affected them losing their job.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained the procedure to be followed when an employee fell ill and the reporting mechanism with First Care.

The Vice-Chair asked if Unison could be asked for their view about sickness levels and any implications for staff.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

12 – Revenues and Benefits' Shared Services report

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer asked whether the Scrutiny Committee would require copies of the Revenues and Benefits report to the Three Rivers and Watford Shared Services Joint Committee each time they were published.

It was agreed that the reports would be circulated to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

15 – SLM statistics

The Vice-Chair referred to comments raised during the debate at Council the previous week about the petition regarding women's swimming sessions. During 2010/11 SLM had been invited to Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee to discuss the leisure centres and the service provided. He asked that a written explanation was sought from the company regarding the complaints about staff attitude and the issue of men being present in the changing area when it should be for the exclusive use of the female swimmers and children.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

16 – Affordable housing provision

The Chair asked the Committee and Scrutiny Officer to liaise with the Housing Section Head enquiring when the outcome of the funding bids approved by the Homes and Communities Agency would be known.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer.

20 – Mayor's Community Fund

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had received a response from Community Services but had asked for further clarification as it was still not clear whether an application would be accepted from Ward Councillors. She explained that the Grant Officer had advised that an individual would not be able to submit an application and that a group or organisation should complete the application form.

The Vice-Chair commented that there were occasions when there was not a particular group involved in a Neighbourhood forum Project.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer to seek further clarification

It was noted that the remaining actions were covered in other reports on the agenda.

16. **CALL-IN**

No Executive decisions had been called in.

17. **AFFORDABLE HOUSING REVIEW**

The Scrutiny Committee received Cabinet's response to the recommendations from the Policy Development Scrutiny Committee's Affordable Housing review, which had been carried out during 2010/11.

The Chair reported that dates for future reviews of the recommendations had been included.

Recommendation 1 – affordable housing threshold

It was noted that the Core Strategy was unlikely to be adopted prior to autumn 2012.

It was agreed that the status of the core strategy would be reviewed in 12 months time.

Recommendation 5 – housing resources

It was agreed that this recommendation should be reviewed at the Scrutiny Committee's November meeting.

Recommendation 6 – Task Group regarding benefit changes

The Vice-chair asked that this be monitored through statistics. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer said that she would amend the date for review to “To be kept under review”.

A Member commented that she was concerned about the standard of private housing that low income families might be advised to rent. She said that the Council should monitor these properties.

The Chair suggested that a letter could be sent to the Head of Environmental Services to ask what procedures were in place to monitor private sector housing. He asked the Councillor to forward an outline of the points she would like the Head of Service to cover.

A Member said that the Housing Section Head should also be asked for her comments.

RESOLVED –

that the actions be noted.

ACTION: Councillor McLeod, Chair and Vice-Chair and Committee and Scrutiny Officer

18. **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had been in contact with the Community Safety Manager. It was proposed that the first meeting would be an introduction to Community Safety, as there were a number of new Members to the task Group. The presentation could also include an explanation about crime statistics which last year’s Task Group had requested. The meeting would be open to all Members and any presentations would be made available to those Members who were unable to attend. The first meeting was likely to be established in early September.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer outlined a list of items for inclusion in the Task Group’s work programme.

- Introduction to the Community Safety Partnership
- Crime statistics
- Crime levels in Central Ward and the lack of contributions from clubs and pubs towards the high policing costs for the night time economy
- Community probation works procedure
- Recruitment of ex-offenders and disadvantaged youth

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

19. **BUDGET PANEL UPDATE**

The Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Budget Panel due to take place in July had been cancelled.

The Scrutiny Committee discussed whether a regular report was required regarding Budget Panel. The Chair said that it was different from Task Groups. Members were advised that recommendations about the draft budget were reported directly to Council and that there was insufficient time to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well.

It was noted that four members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, including the Chair and Vice-Chair, were members of Budget Panel.

It was agreed that Budget Panel would only report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee when it required this committee to consider recommendations and make a decision.

RESOLVED –

that a report regarding Budget Panel only be included in the agenda when a specific recommendation has been forwarded to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

20. **FORWARD PLAN**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Head of Legal and Property Services including the latest edition of the Forward Plan and changes since the edition published in June.

Section 106 funding

The Scrutiny Committee discussed Section 106 funding gained through the planning process. Members were unsure whether it was monitored by a committee.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer advised that she would check whether it was monitored by Budget Panel.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

The Vice-Chair informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Call-in and Performance Scrutiny Committee had considered a recent report regarding the Section 106 funding. He added that the Hertfordshire Highways Watford Joint Member Panel had debated the Section 106 funding allocated to highways projects. The discussion had included how Members were able to influence this area.

The Chair suggested that more training was required for Members and that they should be more alert of new developments in their area.

It was agreed that the Head of Planning would be asked to provide information about the various Sections 106 strands; the amount of funds available in each and any proposed schemes.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

Herts Waste Partnership Agreement

The Vice-Chair asked that Members be informed as soon as officers were aware of the date of this delegated decision. He advised Members that they were able to attend these decisions. He thought it would be good practice if the Chair or Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee attended these decisions. He reminded Members that they were able to call-in Cabinet decisions and those made by Portfolio Holders. He asked whether there was a further list of future decisions to be taken through the year.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the Forward Plan was only required to show decisions to be taken within the next four months. Future decisions were added to the Plan as soon as Democratic Services were informed by officers.

The Chair felt that there was insufficient information included in the Plan. He considered the best action would be for Members to call-in decisions they wanted to investigate further.

RESOLVED –

that the Scrutiny Committee's comments be noted.

21. **WORK PROGRAMME AND TASK GROUPS**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Legal and Democratic Section Head setting out information regarding the proposed Task Groups. Preparatory information for the Hospital Parking review had also been included.

Hospital Parking

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reported that five Councillors had expressed an interest in working on the Hospital Parking Review. It was agreed that these Councillors would form the membership of the Task Group.

The Chair advised that he had drafted the scope and sought the Scrutiny Committee's approval. He had made some changes to the original suggestion to avoid any sense of a pre-determined outcome.

The Associate Director – Strategic Developments from the West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust had supplied a copy of the hospital's parking policy. The policy would be included in the background information for the Task Group.

The Chair felt that the review should be completed in a reasonably short period of time. The Vice-Chair, however, cautioned about setting time constraints as other issues might arise during the review.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer asked the Scrutiny Committee for clarification on the area officers were researching regarding other hospitals' parking arrangements. At the previous meeting Members had suggested all hospitals within a 20-mile radius. This radius incorporated approximately 190 hospitals including those in central London. If the radius were limited to a 10-mile radius, the number was reduced to 24. A number of hospitals within Hertfordshire would not be included in this radius.

A Member suggested that the hospitals needed to be in a similar context to Watford General Hospital, but it should not include those hospitals in central London.

Another Member suggested that it was important to include hospitals within Hertfordshire.

The Chair said that it was important the Scrutiny Committee did not limit the work of the Task Group and the Task Group should make the final decision.

RESOLVED –

1. that the following Councillors form the membership for the Hospital Parking Task Group
 - Councillor Karen Collett
 - Councillor Malcolm Meerabux
 - Councillor Peter Jeffree
 - Councillor Kareen Hastrick
 - Councillor Ken Brodhurst
2. that the scope for the Hospital Parking Review be approved.

Review of the Property Policy (Voluntary Sector)

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that she had contacted the Head of Legal and Property Services and Property Section Head. The officers had advised that they considered it too early to begin to review the property policy, but they would welcome Members' support later in the year.

The Vice-Chair considered that a scope would not be ready until at least September.

The Chair asked for suggestions for inclusion in the review. Members put forward the following ideas –

- Affordable housing – land availability, for example allotment land
- Property leasing procedures
- Appeal procedures

RESOLVED –

1. that the Chair and Vice-Chair develop a draft scope for the property policy review for consideration at the September meeting.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer / Chair and Vice-Chair

22. **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Wednesday 10 August 2011 (For call-in only)
- Wednesday 21 September 2011
- Wednesday 12 October 2011 (For call-in only)

Chair
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting started at 7.00 p.m.
and finished at 8.20 p.m.