

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 September 2013

Present: Councillor Martins (Chair) (for minute numbers 24 to 29)  
Councillor Khan (Chair) (for minute numbers 30 to 38)  
Councillors Aron, Bell, Hastrick, Johnson, Lovejoy and Walford

Also present: Councillor Dhindsa, Chair of Budget Panel  
Councillor Meerabux

Officers: Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services  
(for minute numbers 24 to 31)  
Partnerships and Performance Section Head  
(for minute numbers 24 to 31)  
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

### 24. CHAIR

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reported that Councillor Collett was unable to attend the meeting. Councillor Khan, the Vice-Chair, would be attending but due to work commitments would be late. The Scrutiny Committee agreed to wait for a short while. After 10 minutes it was agreed the meeting should start and the Committee and Scrutiny Officer sought nominations for Chair.

RESOLVED –

that Councillor Martins be elected Chair until Councillor Khan arrived.

### 25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Walford replaced Councillor Greenslade.

As reported at minute number 24, apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Collett. Apologies had also been received from Councillor Counter, Chair of the Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.

### 26. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Councillor Hastrick informed the Scrutiny Committee that with reference to minute number 34, she was on Watford Community Housing Trust's Board.

### 27. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 July 2013 were submitted and signed.

### 28. CALL-IN

No Executive decisions had been called in.

29. **OUTSTANDING ACTIONS AND QUESTIONS**

The Scrutiny Committee received updates on questions and actions raised at previous meetings.

RESOLVED –

that the updates be noted.

Councillor Khan took the Chair

30. **UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND MEASURES – END OF QUARTER 1 (APRIL-JUNE) 2013/14**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head setting out the Council's performance indicators and measures up to the end of quarter 1 2013/14.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head highlighted some of the changes to the indicators since the previous report. She reminded Members that following the changes to the Council's structure on 1 July there would be further amendments in quarter 2.

CS16 – Number of private sector units secured for use under HomeLet

Councillor Bell noted that new schemes had been developed. He asked whether there was a register of certified landlords or if any landlord could participate.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services informed the Scrutiny Committee that information about HomeLet was available on the Council's website (<http://www.watford.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/housing/watford-homelet---private-renting/>). There were several packages available to landlords. Further information would be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.

CS17 – Number of households in bed and breakfast and nightly lets

Following a question from Councillor Bell, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services explained that the nightly lets were all based in Watford. There were occasions when bed and breakfast accommodation was located outside Watford, but this was only in an emergency. She advised that the service would be asked to provide further details which would be circulated to Members.

Councillor Aron noted that the actual total matched the target for the quarter. She asked what action was being taken to find these people permanent accommodation.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services advised that this was not a static figure. There was a limited amount of time people could stay in bed and breakfast accommodation. The Council tried to move people into temporary

accommodation as soon as possible, for example hostels. Dependent on a person's eligibility and vacant properties, people were then assisted to secure permanent accommodation. There was a huge demand for housing but there was a disproportionate lack of supply of properties. HomeLet and the Rent Deposit Guarantee scheme had been developed to help people find a property within the private rented sector.

### Street cleaning and recycling

Councillor Meerabux referred to the various performance indicators related to street and environmental cleanliness. He said that they appeared to have a positive message, however he felt that the information did not provide the whole picture. He was aware that some streets were in a very poor state. He asked whether officers could 'drill' down through the information and identify the problem streets and send warning letters to residents and businesses in the locality. When he identified a problem he contacted Veolia and the matter was resolved. In terraced streets there was a problem with fly tipping and litter. He felt that if the matter were dealt with by the Council it would lead to better waste disposal management.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services said that the main issue was to be able to identify hot spots. Veolia, in its role as contractor, responded to issues as they were identified. Environmental Health was responsible for any enforcement action. Veolia and Environmental Health worked together on these matters. The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services added that the resources were not available to enable officers to walk around the Borough looking for any problems. It was important that the public and Councillors reported any problems with litter and fly tipping to enable Veolia and the Council to take action by cleaning the area and taking enforcement action when possible.

Councillor Meerabux referred to contaminated recycling. He asked whether investigation was undertaken to try to identify where the contamination had taken place.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services informed the Scrutiny Committee that Veolia was introducing a system whereby operators would be issued with hand held devices and would be able to report back to the office if they identified any problems, for example fly tipping or graffiti. She advised that the recycling arrangements were changing from November. The new scheme would be more accessible as the co-mingling of recyclables was being introduced.

The Chair commented that he was aware that in the past there had been problems in his road and within his ward. The Council had identified the hot spots and enforcement action had been taken. He asked whether this type of information had been transferred to Veolia.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services responded that the Council staff had been transferred to Veolia and were still in the same building as the Council's Enforcement Officers. The two teams had a good relationship.

Councillor Martins referred to rubbish left in front gardens and asked what powers the Council had in these circumstances.

Councillor Lovejoy commented that she understood that the Council was only able to take action if there was a threat of rats, otherwise the Council could not take action on private property.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services advised that she would contact the service and ensure the information on the Council's statutory powers in relation to private gardens was circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Dhindsa stated that he was aware of a case where a property had a large amount of metal waste in the front garden. The Council wrote to the owner and the metal had been removed. He added that he had contacted Veolia on three occasions about different problems and for two of these he had been referred to the Council, however, the problems had still not been resolved satisfactorily. The third problem had been about graffiti and Veolia had had the area cleaned within three to four hours.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services asked Councillor Dhindsa to contact her with details of the two matters which had not been resolved to enable her to investigate further. She added that if Councillors were unsuccessful when they contacted Veolia then they should contact the Client Team to report the matter.

#### RB2 – Average time to process change of circumstances

Councillor Aron commented that delays in processing the change of circumstance applications led to overpayments. She had noted that new claims applications had improved. She asked what action could be taken to speed up the processes. She acknowledged that there were occasions when the delays were as a result of claimants not submitting their information promptly.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services reported that this was an area of concern for the Council and had been discussed at Leadership Team. Improvements were being made. The Shared Director of Finance was undertaking a review of the service.

The Chair said that all Councillors were concerned about the Revenues and Benefits service. He had been present at Audit Committee the previous evening and the external auditors had made reference to the over expenditure of the service in their report. He believed that Overview and Scrutiny Committee should take the lead on scrutinising the service. The Shared Services Joint Committee was the governing body for the service. Audit Committee and Budget Panel reviewed the financial aspects. He suggested that relevant officers and the Portfolio Holder should attend the Scrutiny Committee on a more frequent basis.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Scrutiny Committee that following the Head of Revenues and Benefits' attendance at the June meeting, Members had asked that the Head of Revenues and Benefits should return in six months time. An update by the Head of Revenues and Benefits had been added to the programme for the meeting in January 2014.

The Chair stated that Councillors had very real concerns about the performance of

the service. They wanted to see improvements. It was agreed that this subject should be added to the agenda for the next meeting. The Shared Director of Finance, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Portfolio Holder should be invited to attend and to provide timescales for improvements and the plans that were in place to aid the improvement of the performance measures. The Chair asked Members to email any suggested questions for the officers and Portfolio Holder to the Committee and Scrutiny Officer. This would enable them to ensure they had the appropriate information for the Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer reminded the Scrutiny Committee that the Shared Services Joint Committee's decisions were reported to all Councillors. If they were not satisfied with any of the decisions they could request them to be called in.

Councillor Martins suggested that officers should be asked how they identified people who were affected by the long delays and how the Council could help these people. The Chair agreed that the social impact on claimants due to the delays was an excellent area to be covered.

RESOLVED –

1. that the performance of the council's performance measures for 2013/14 at the end of quarter 1 be noted.
2. that the majority of the performance measures for Environmental Services to be reported to Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel.
3. that the new service areas will be reporting the performance measures from quarter 2, following the implementation of the new Council structure from 1 July 2013.
4. that the information requested during the discussion be circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.
5. that the Shared Director of Finance, Head of Revenues and Benefits and Portfolio Holder responsible for Shared Services be invited to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in November to report on the timescales and plans in place to improve the performance measures in respect of change of circumstances applications.
6. that Councillors forward any questions about Revenues and Benefits to the Committee and Scrutiny Officer for circulation to officers in preparation for the November meeting.

ACTION: Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services / Committee and Scrutiny Officer / Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### 31. **PREVIOUS REVIEW UPDATE: SERVICES FOR THE DECEASED**

The Scrutiny Committee received an update on the progress of the recommendations from the Services for the Deceased Task Group's report published in 2010.

The Head of Corporate Strategy and Client Services informed the Scrutiny Committee that the original review had been carried out three years ago. The main point from the review was the financial viability of the service. She outlined any further changes since the last update in 2012. She advised that Veolia was responsible for the maintenance of the cemeteries and digging the burial spaces. The Council had retained the management of the cemeteries. The Council had come to an agreement with West Herts Crematorium that it would provide support for the Cemetery Manager and cover any periods she was absent. This provided the Cemetery Manager with an improved support mechanism.

RESOLVED –

that the update be noted.

**32. EXECUTIVE DECISION PROGRESS REPORT**

The Scrutiny Committee received the latest edition of the Executive Decision Progress Report 2013/14. The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed Members that one item had been deleted from the list as the matter had been delayed for the foreseeable future. She also advised that four decisions had been allocated to the wrong service and this would be updated in the next edition.

RESOLVED –

that the report be noted.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

**33. HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Scrutiny Committee noted that there had been no further meetings of the Health Scrutiny Committee. The next meeting was due to take place in October.

**34. WATFORD COMMUNITY HOUSING TRUST TASK GROUP – FINAL REPORT**

The Scrutiny Committee received a report of the Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer including the Task Group's final report.

Councillor Khan, who had chaired the Task Group, informed the Scrutiny Committee that the Task Group had used some innovative methods. Councillors had directly contacted tenants in their homes to ask about their experiences with the Housing Trust. An evening event had been arranged to meet tenants to chat about their experiences. The Task Group received a lot of information from tenants. When the Task Group met the Housing Trust's Chief Executive and other officers, Members had used a Select Committee approach. Each Task Group Member had asked questions about a specific area. There had been a frank exchange of questions and answers at the meeting. The final report provided a clear set of recommendations.

Councillor Johnson, who had also been a member of the Task Group, commented that all though there were 20 recommendations; it was felt they were necessary.

He acknowledged the Housing Trust had carried out some good work, however, the recommendations covered those areas in which it was felt improvements could be made.

Councillor Khan said that it was important to scrutinise outside bodies as they had an impact on the town's residents. This Task Group had worked very well.

It was agreed that the Housing Trust would be asked for their comments about the Task Group's recommendations. Members also felt that it was important that tenants knew when the Housing Trust's comments were expected. The Chair suggested that the Housing Trust's Chief Executive and the Board's Chair should be invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee in three months time.

Councillor Martins thanked the Task Group for carrying out this scrutiny. Repairs were a major issue for tenants. He suggested that the report should be sent to the Chair's of those Residents' and Tenants' Associations who covered Housing Trust properties. The Trust's initial comments should also be forwarded to the Residents' and Tenants' Associations.

Councillor Hastrick asked that those tenants who had participated in the scrutiny be asked for their views on the recommendations.

Following a question from Councillor Dhindsa, the Committee and Scrutiny Officer explained that the Council could not force external bodies to implement a Task Group's recommendations. Hopefully by working with the organisation, it could be encouraged to carry out the Task Group's recommendations.

The Chair said that in his opinion the recommendations were reasonable.

The Scrutiny Committee agreed that the following people or groups should be forwarded a copy of the report either by post or electronically –

- Watford Community Housing Trust
- Tenants who participated in the review
- Residents' and Tenants' Associations
- Watford Borough Council's Cabinet
- The Head of Community and Customer Services
- Email the link to all Watford Borough Councillors
- Three Rivers District Councillors who have Housing Trust property within their wards

The Committee and Scrutiny Officer informed the Scrutiny Committee that the final report would be added to the Library on the committee and councillor section of the Council's website. She advised that she had already uploaded the previous scrutiny reports which had been completed since 2011.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Watford Community Housing Trust Task Group's final report and its recommendations be approved.
2. that the report be circulated to those parties referred to by Overview and

Scrutiny Committee.

3. that the Chief Executive of Watford Community Housing Trust be invited to attend Overview and Scrutiny Committee's meeting in January 2014.

ACTION: Committee and Scrutiny Officer

35. **BUDGET PANEL**

Councillor Dhindsa, the Chair of Budget Panel, provided an update on the meetings held on Wednesday 10 July and Tuesday 10 September. He added that at the next meeting, on 29 October, a training session on Local Government Finance would take place and would be open to all Councillors.

It was noted that the minutes were available on the Council's website and had been circulated separately to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

36. **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

Councillor Counter, the Chair of Outsourced Services Scrutiny Panel, had provided a written update of the Scrutiny Panel's meeting on Tuesday 16 July 2013.

It was noted that the minutes were available on the Council's website and had been circulated separately to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

37. **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP TASK GROUP**

Councillor Khan, the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Task Group, provided a brief update of the meeting held on Tuesday 9 September 2013.

It was noted that the minutes were available on the Council's website and had been circulated separately to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

38. **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

- Thursday 26 September 2013
- Thursday 24 October 2013 (For call-in only)
- Thursday 28 November 2013

Chair  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The meeting started at 7.10 p.m.  
and finished at 8.55 p.m.