

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
3 March 2020

## WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Tuesday 3 March 2020 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors S.Wrenn (Chairman)  
P.Smith (Vice-Chairman)

M.Birleson, E.Boulton, J.Broach (left 9.45pm and returned at 9.47pm during Item 16), M.Cowan, J.Cragg, C Juggins, F.Marsh (substituting for T.Jackson-Mynott), J.Weston (left at 9.08pm and returned at 9.10pm during Item13) and P.Zukowskyj.

ALSO Councillors F.Thomson (Executive Member, Governance, Public  
PRESENT: Health and Climate Change)  
S.Boulton (Executive Member, Regeneration, Economic Development and Partnerships) (left at 8.35pm at the start of Item 10)

OFFICIALS Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance)  
PRESENT: (N.Long)  
Head of Planning (C.Haigh)  
Risk and Resilience Manager (A.Cremer)  
Website Development and Intranet Manager (L.Ellis)  
Digital Services Manager (L.White)  
Team Leader (Environmental Health and Licensing) (J.Hollingsworth)  
Tree Officer (O.Waring)  
Senior Performance and Strategy Officer (G.Crawford)  
Economic Development Officer (L.Devayya)  
Environmental Health Technical Officer (T.Vincent)  
Principal Governance Officer (A.Marston)  
Governance Services Officer (H.Johnson)

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### 54. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of a Committee Member had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules: Councillor F.Marsh for Councillor T.Jackson-Mynott.

### 55. APOLOGY

An apology for absence was received from Councillor T.Jackson-Mynott.

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56. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57. ACTIONS UPDATE

There were no updates on actions from previous meetings to report.

58. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 24

The Chairman agreed that an additional item to brief the Committee on the launch of an online Healthy Hub would be presented as an urgent item because the Healthy Hub website was due to be launched in June 2020. It was also agreed that the update would be presented after Item 7 and not under Item 24.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Councillor P.Zukowskyj declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of him being a County Councillor.

60. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

No public questions or petitions had been received prior to the meeting.

61. HEALTHY HUB

The presentation by the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) briefed Members on the development of an online Healthy Hub. The Public Health and Protection team had been working with the Communications team to develop an intuitive online hub that offered improved access to local health and wellbeing services, sports facilities as well as trusted guidance from the NHS. The healthy hub would provide access to:

The project was part of a wider scheme by Public Health England to provide healthy hubs across the country.

Following the launch of the website in June 2020, the second stage of the project would involve the development of a "My account" feature, "Healthy Hub Ambassadors", news and events, as well as an outreach assistance programme.

Members felt that they could advise constituents of the facility prior to its launch.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the presentation on the online Healthy Hub Welwyn Hatfield, due to be launched in June 2020.

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62. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the economic development activity that had taken place since the last report to the Committee in September 2019 and the actions planned for 2020 for Members to consider.

The Committee noted that:

- Welwyn Hatfield Career Fair - was planned for 14 October 2020 at the Fielder Centre in Hatfield and sponsorship from local businesses had been arranged.
- Apprenticeship Event – was held in November 2019. Approximately one hundred businesses attended and it was hugely successful.
- Hertfordshire LEP Apprenticeship Sub-Group – this would give the Council the opportunity to work on the development of the Hertfordshire Apprenticeship Strategy.
- Protect and Grow Your Business Reputation – another successful event aimed at simplifying regulation for SMEs took place in January 2020 at the Fielder Centre in Hatfield.

Members agreed that it was good to know that local businesses were being supported.

AGREED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the economic development activity that had taken place since September 2019 and the actions planned for 2020.

63. RETAIL STRATEGY

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the Council's current retail strategy, which currently was a wide-ranging number of policies for Members to consider.

The report set out the numerous policies, frameworks and initiatives such as the development at Highview, the Welwyn BID (Business Improvement district), Welwyn Renewal Partnership and the redevelopment of Hatfield Town Centre. It also set out the limitations of the Council when it came to business units, but they could be supported through the planning system.

A Member felt that the Committee had waited too long for the report, having requested it mid-2019 and that an overarching strategy contained in one document was required. Shop closures, such as Debenhams and Halfords in Welwyn Garden City, highlighted the challenges faced by town centres. They felt that much more that could be done over and above what was currently being done to improve retail and bring visitors into the town.

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Then Councillor M.Cowan moved and Councillor J.Broach seconded that:

“Members believe a dynamic strategy is needed to help arrest the decline in our town centres; this will build on town centres being not only commercial but also the social meeting places that online can never be. This strategy should aim to include:

- Working with landowners to provide smaller units to help starter and innovative businesses,
- Learning from and adoption of approaches used elsewhere,
- Working with the local Chamber of Commerce and similar local business support organisations,
- The presence of an active town centre manager to bring in the necessary dynamism,
- Closer joint working of the teams whose work affects the town centres,
- In accordance with the Government’s own review into High Streets in 2012, this Council maintain free parking in town centres where it currently exists and review the position where there is not”.

A discussion followed and the following points were raised by Members:

- Some Members agreed with the motion and that by “aiming” to include the various points it could be agreed to in principle. By highlighting the need for retaining free parking it would ensure that this would be considered in view of the development of the new MSCP (Multi Storey Car Park) in Hatfield.
- Other areas outside of the main town centres ought to be considered such as the small parades of shops at Oaklands, Woolmer Green and Hollybush.
- Other Members felt that the report was a significant piece of work, providing good background and that the recommendations put forward were too specific. Some were also of the view that Welwyn Hatfield was doing very well comparatively and there lacked evidence as to the successes of having a town centre manager.

Officers advised that there was the Corporate Town Centre Group, Chaired by the Chief Executive, which could be an appropriate forum to take the motion to and come back with a proposed way forward.

It was then put to the vote and

RESOLVED:  
(6 voting for and 5 against)

- (1) That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members agree that a dynamic strategy is needed to help arrest the decline in our town centres; this will build on town centres being not only

commercial but also the social meeting places that online can never be. This strategy should aim to include:

- Working with landowners to provide smaller units to help start and innovative businesses,
- Learning from and adoption of approaches used elsewhere,
- Working with the local Chamber of Commerce and similar local business support organisations,
- The presence of an active town centre manager to bring in the necessary dynamism,
- Closer joint working of the teams whose work affects the town centres,
- In accordance with the Government's own review into High Streets in 2012, this Council maintain free parking in town centres where it currently exists and review the position where there is not".

64. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 3

The report of the Corporate Director (Environment, Resources and Cultural Services) and accompanying presentation set out the performance indicator data collected for those services that fall within its remit for the Committee to note. It provided Quarter 3 along with comparative information where possible.

All the KPIs for the quarter had been met.

KPI 25 "The percentage of all minor and other planning applications processed and decide on within 8 weeks."

Members praised the Planning team for their performance although some Members felt that as the target had been consistently met it ought to be increased. Officers confirmed that the target was set nationally.

KPI 18 "The percentage of household waste collected and sent for rescue, recycling and composting"

Members queried why the Council had not aligned with the Hertfordshire County Council target of 50% or the European target of 70%. Officers confirmed that the targets were set internally and that the query would be passed onto the Environmental Services team. Members also queried, based on their experience and on those of some of their residents, as to why complaints concerning missed bins were not collated in one place for Officers to respond to. Officers agreed to follow up with the Environmental Services team.

Finally, Members thought it would be helpful for the report to detail whether a KPI target had been set internally or nationally.

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RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the Quarter 3 performance indicator data for services that fall within its remit.

65. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY

The report and accompanying presentation of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the final draft of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, annual action plan and results of the consultation.

The five priorities were

- To reduce Social Isolation and Improve Community Cohesion.
- To protect and enhance our Environment, including the built environment, and green space.
- Increase levels of Physical Activity and Reduce levels of Obesity.
- Improve the opportunities in the Borough to improve mental health and wellbeing and increase resilience within individuals.
- Protect our communities from harm by delivering robust and effective health protection arrangements.

The launch of the online Healthy Hub tied in with the overall strategy and the encouraging the public to take responsibility for their own health.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee review the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and annual action plan for recommend to Full Council for adoption.

66. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE BENEFITS OF THE BOROUGH'S TREES AND WOODLANDS

The presentation of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the benefits of the borough's trees and woodlands, using a well-known system called Tree-economics.

The primary driver for the presentation was in response to the Council's declaration of a climate emergency. An i-Tree Eco Survey had been carried out to assess the environmental benefits of the Council's trees in terms of carbon capture. The figures were based on Council owned trees only and the two largest woodlands (Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood).

Members noted that the environmental benefits in terms of carbon sequestration were calculated at 2,384 tonnes of carbon. There were other benefits too such as removing pollution from the air and reducing flooding. It was also noted that

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the Council's tree stock was diverse (consisting of 237 different varieties) which ensured good resilience against pest and disease. In addition the broad age range of trees ensured the tree stock was sustainable.

The economic benefits were calculated via the Capital Asset Valuation for the Amenity of Trees (CAVAT) system, and the figure was over £3 million. It was also noted that to replace the Council's trees (theoretically) it would cost £27 million, hence the importance of managing the tree stock well.

Following the presentation Members raised several points which were clarified by Officers:

- The figures did not include private trees. The Council only had influence on private trees through the planning system (trees in Conservation Areas, Estate Managed Areas and trees with Tree Preservation Orders).
- The Council had a good mix of trees, with no one tree being overly dominant. The highest number of one species was cherry at 12% of the tree stock.
- Trees did release carbon into the atmosphere once they died, however with the tree stock being constantly replenished, this was accounted for in the figures.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note both the economic and amenity value and benefits of the Councils trees and woodlands.

## 67. RESILIENCE UPDATE

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) updated Members on the principal resilience activities that had been carried out by the Risk and Resilience Team over the period since the previous report in January 2019.

Members asked how Officers were responding to the Coronavirus epidemic. Officers advised that:

- They had been developing plans, ensuring it was sensible and proportionate. They had built on plans developed in 2009 with regards to Swine Flu and national advice from Public Health England and the National Health Service (NHS) were also being built into their plan.
- They were part of the county-wide strategic coordination group, the Local Resilience Forum (LRF).
- An internal officer group, representing various service areas in the Council, would be meeting again this week and then the plan would be formally adopted

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- Members had already received guidance, and guidance for staff would follow in due course.

The Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) added that the Gov.uk website was the single point of advice and their role as community leaders was to follow the advice coming forward and support residents.

Members then asked whether there had been any notable flooding as a result of the recent storms, Storm Ciera and Storm Dennis. Officers confirmed that there was generally a low risk from water courses in Welwyn Hatfield and they did not receive any callouts during the storms. There has been an increase in surface water flooding in recent years, but nothing less significant than some other areas of the county.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the principal resilience activities that had been carried out by the Risk and Resilience Team over the period since the previous report in January 2019.

68. UPDATE OF THE OPERATION REPRISE AND BALSAM NOISE CALL OUT SERVICES

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the work undertaken by the Public Health and Protection team and the Street Warden team taking part in the immediate noise response services (Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam).

Members noted that demand had dropped significantly over the years and now the service was offered for only one week and was funded by the university. It was noted that noise complaints were not just related to students but also premises - these were managed by serving an abatement notice and the licensing team could then review the premises license.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the work undertaken by the Public Health and Protection team and the Street Warden team taking part in the immediate noise response services (Operation Reprise and Operation Balsam).

69. PEST CONTROL UPDATE

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) provided Members with an annual update relating to the performance of the pest control contractor and the work and services that had been provided for the period April 2018 to March 2019.

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The Council had no duty to provide the service but did so at a subsidized cost to its residents. There had been no significant changes since the last update.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the annual update relating to the performance of the pest control contractor and the work and services that had been provided for the period April 2018 to March 2019.

70. AIR QUALITY MONITORING RESULTS FOR 2018

The report and accompanying presentation of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) provided Members with the air quality monitoring results for 2018 and an outline of the Council's monitoring programme.

It was explained that the Council was required to submit an annual status report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

Members were briefed on the installation of the Council's real time nitrogen dioxide analyser. Following the breach of the nitrogen dioxide limit at West View, Hatfield, in the 2018 report, the Council was instructed by DEFRA to monitor the location for a further three years. The nitrogen dioxide analyser at West View had been installed in early 2020.

Members noted that the Council was no longer in breach, nor were there any sites within the district that breached any of the limit values set out in the Environment Act 1995.

Members queried whether there was anything the Council could do to reduce the number of parents keeping their car engines going outside schools. Officers had done some work around this but that the response had been disappointing. They were now looking at school educational initiatives instead.

A Member also raised concerns on behalf of their residents with regards to whether monitoring devices could be located to sites where future housing development was planned. Officers agreed but that it was not always possible to do this, as they had to be in-situ for twelve months.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the air quality monitoring results for 2018 and an outline of the Council's monitoring programme.

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71. ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL

The draft annual report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) on the workings of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee was set out for the Committee to agree prior to being presented at the Annual Council Meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (EOSC) review the EOSC Annual Report and recommend that it be presented at the Annual Council Meeting.

72. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21

The pro-forma set out the Committee's overview work programme for 2020/21 which would enable forward planning of items to be considered.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee note the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme for the new municipal year, 2020-21.

73. CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

No further items were considered for scrutiny.

Meeting ended at 9.01pm  
HJ