

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
5 July 2021

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Monday 5 July 2021 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Campus East, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE

PRESENT: Councillors B.Fitzsimon (Chairman)
H.Quenet (Vice-Chairman)

L.Chesterman, S.Elam, G.Hayes, A.Hellyer,
S.Kasumu, F.Marsh, P.Smith, C.Stanbury, T.Travell,
J.Lake and J.Cragg

ALSO Councillor M.Holloway, Chair of Housing Maintenance and
PRESENT Repairs Task and Finish Panel
C.Andrews Co-opted Member: Tenants' Panel Representative

OFFICIALS N.Long, Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and
PRESENT: Governance)
A.Marston, Governance Services Manager
S.Saunders, Legal Services Manager
R.Baker, Head of Resources
B.Moreira, Senior Housing Options Officer
J.Anthony, Principal Governance Officer

1. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution was made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Councillor J.Cragg for Councillor G. Michaelides
Councillor J.Lake for Councillor R.Trigg

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absences were received from Councillor George Michaelides and Councillor Roger Trigg.

3. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2021 (previously circulated) were approved as a correct record. Members thanked the Governance Services team for accurately reflecting the points raised at the previous meeting.

Members noted the following points:

- Officers would arrange a meeting with the police to discuss the issue of county lines and drug issues, and invite a limited number of Members to participate
- Updates on the Community Safety Partnership and scrutiny of the 2022/23 budget would be provided in the meeting

It was also noted that the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2020 had yet to be approved.

4. SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH PANELS (T&PS) PROGRESS REPORTS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

Members received a report from Councillor Max Holloway, Chair of the Housing Maintenance and Repairs Task and Finish Panel.

The following points were noted:

- The Housing Maintenance and Repairs Task and Finish Panel was set up to look at some of the persistent issues that Members had been made aware of by residents in relation to the maintenance and repairs service
- The Panel had met on two occasions since it was established in February 2021, with the work paused during the pre-election period.
- These sessions examined the key performance indicators the service was working to, providing Members with a body of information from which Members could then use to determine which areas to focus on
- Given that the Panel had been reconstituted, with new members joining, it was proposed that the task and finish panel would review again the background information that had been provided thus far and determine a new direction and hasten its work in identifying meaningful outcomes
- The next Panel meeting, to be held week commencing Monday 19 July, would identify the key scrutiny questions the Panel would like answered
- Panel meetings would take place in Part II to facilitate more open discussion and avoid the disclosure of sensitive information. However any findings and recommendation will be shared under Part I. This is in line with the successful practice established for scrutiny of the annual budget
- To ensure the work is concluded swiftly it is proposed that Panel members would attend all meetings and avoid the use of substitutes
- The aim is to conclude the work and report findings to the November Committee meeting

5. UPCOMING SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH PANELS (T&PS)

Members received a report of the Head of Resources, outlining the arrangements proposed for the scrutiny of the 2022/23 annual budget. It was proposed that the scrutiny would meeting monthly, with the first meeting taking

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place in September 2021 once the Medium Term Financial Strategy has been updated. The Panel would then be expected to return the January 2022 Committee meeting with any recommendations for Cabinet to consider.

6. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

Members received a report of the Corporate Director (Housing and Communities) outlining the innovative ways in which the Community Safety Partnership has continued to engage with the community and key stakeholders despite Covid-19 restrictions.

The following points were raised and noted:

- Funding arrangements will differ between projects and seasonal arrangements. In some cases funding is able to be rolled onto subsequent years if not utilised
- Whilst some of the project may look similar, they do serve difference purposes and have been specifically designed to target particular groups, age ranges and/or use specific partners and skill sets
- Clients are able to be passed from one service to another
- Progress is monitored on all projects and reviewed on a monthly basis
- Officers are able to see the differences these projects are having on individuals
- Partnership approach is key to ensure resources are fully utilised and avoid individuals at risk falling through any gaps
- Information on the Community Safety Partnership was available on line and could be circulated to Members

RESOLVED

Members unanimously agreed to note the report and support the Community Safety Partnerships' ongoing commitment and innovative ways in which it continues to engage with the community.

7. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

The Principal Governance Officer explained to the Committee that all Members of the Council would be invited to suggest areas that should be considered for scrutiny. This list would then be reviewed by the Chair and Vice Chairs of the Committee to produce a shortlist. The full Committee would then be invited to consider the shortlist, score and agree those areas to focus on.

The Chair reminded Members that in order for the scrutiny to be effective, the approach previously agreed was to identify a small number of focused areas of scrutiny rather than take a broad brush approach.

Members raised the issue of affordable housing requirements for new developments. Officers agreed that they would collate the relevant documents

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and produce a briefing note for the Members' Information Hub. Members would then be able to identify those areas which might require further examination.

Members enquired about the development of the Gosling Master Plan (Forward Plan reference FP1061). Officers confirmed that the Cabinet report has been published, and contains details of the proposed procurement process for developing a Master Plan. This would include a public engagement exercise designed to provide an assessment of the needs and requirements of the borough's residents. The following step would then be to consider how the Gosling site could meet that need.

Members also asked about the Revenues and Benefits – Risk Based Verification Policy (Forward Plan reference FP1062). Officers explained that the policy proposed using established risk based approach to determine the level of checks and verifications undertaken on information provided for benefit claims based on how that information or benefit application is received. For example information received directly from the Department of Works and Pensions was deemed to be of low risk and therefore may not need the same level of checks as other information received.

Meeting ended at 8.09 pm
JA