

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 September 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Tuesday 26 September 2023 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber

PRESENT: Councillors L.Musk (Chair)
T.Rowse (Vice-Chairman) and A.Hellyer (Vice-Chairman)

L.Crofton, M.Siewniak, C.Stanbury, S.Thusu, R.Trigg,
T.Mitchinson, A.Nix, D.Panter, B.Sarson, K.Thorpe and
F.Thomson

OFFICIALS K.Ng, Chief Executive
PRESENT: R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)
B Trueman, Assistant Director (ICT & Digital)
R. Misir, Democratic Services Officer
S.Saunders, Legal Services Manager

69. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:
Cllr Thomson for Cllr Michaelides.

70. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michaelides.

71. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023 (previously circulated) were approved as a correct record.

72. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 8

There were no items of urgent business.

73. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

Cllr S Thusu and F Thomson advised they are Members of Hertfordshire County Council.

74. DATE AND TIME OF UPCOMING SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH PANELS (T&PS)

The Committee noted the dates of forthcoming task and finish panels as set out in the agenda.

75. HOUSING MAINTENANCE

The Chief Executive set out the report, noting both Cabinet Housing Panel and a cross party Housing Maintenance Group had been looking at housing maintenance. Based on the scoring matrix, Overview and Scrutiny Committee had wanted to understand whether these groups were working as efficiently and effectively as they should, which was why the report had been produced; it highlighted performance data, minutes of the cross party group, and the outcome and recommendations of the previous task and finish group which was reported back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2022.

Members raised a number of issues:

- Asked whether housing maintenance came under her purview, the Chief Executive explained that in the absence of the relevant Service Director (Property Maintenance and Climate Change), she had attended the cross party group since its inception and oversaw the service; she would continue to do so until the post was recruited to.
- Members asked whether RAG ratings would be helpful and commented that key performance indicators (KPIs) were not clear in the report. Officers noted the KPIs were detailed in Cabinet Housing Panel reports and a Member reflected it would be helpful to look at what had been captured overall and how it fitted into a scrutiny role.
- A Member commented that the report said there were no risk management or climate change implications whereas there was a relationship between them and, for example, building more social housing or installing EV charging points. It was noted that while there were implications for specific housing maintenance projects, the report was based on information Scrutiny had asked for.
- A Member asked what would happen if KPIs were not met. It was explained that officers discussed KPIs regularly and corrective actions were taken to get them on track where necessary. The Senior Management Team considered KPIs on a monthly basis and they were considered quarterly through performance clinic at Cabinet. KPIs were also reported to Cabinet Housing Panel and via Cabinet exception reports.
- A Member asked about progress with damp and mould and whether all affected properties had been identified. Officers advised the action plan had previously been reported and was available on the Member Hub. A comprehensive response had been provided to the government last year, Cabinet Housing Panel had been provided with an update, and information would be included in the next ONE magazine.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 September 2023

- A Member asked about the homelessness strategy and it was explained that Cabinet Housing Panel received updates.
- Members asked whether the customer survey referenced in the report had taken place. Morgan Sindall had a regular customer satisfaction questionnaire via text messaging.
- Members asked about the outcome of the stock conditions survey. It was explained the data had not yet been received and it was intended to provide a report to Cabinet Housing Panel. The survey would help inform the planned maintenance programme.
- Members reflected that they were routinely contacted by residents about housing maintenance issues and wanted to know what other committees were doing; this was a live issue as change was ongoing, which made it difficult from a scrutiny perspective. The report did a good job in showing the range of work over a period of time and a future similar report would be helpful.
- A Member reflected on recent work, including keeping rough sleepers safe during Covid in 2020, an action plan in relation to a compliance issue, the new housing maintenance programme, and work on damp and mould. The report reflected the scope of what the Committee had asked for and it was important that all Members were aware of areas of good performance and where there was room for improvement; all performance data needed to be scrutinised in order that improvement continued. Members of the cross party group could feed back to their groups any areas of concern they felt OSC members should be aware of.
- The cross party minutes from June identified Cllr Chesterman as Chair; noted it would be helpful for minutes from before then to identify who was Chair.
- A Member suggested the Committee could look at any KPIs that were red for two consecutive quarters, thus scrutinising whether Cabinet Housing Panel was agreeing the right actions so that KPIs were on the right trajectory. Another Member asked if a live KPI could be available to Members generally, rather than them being considered meeting by meeting, given that Cabinet Housing Panel was itself scrutinising how the Housing department was performing. The report was seen as helpful and it was noted that all but one of the recommendations had been implemented with the final one being implemented. The Chair suggested the customer service board could provide an overview to the Committee as well as possibly full Council given its work on recording and understanding data and resident complaints. Officers noted performance data KPIs were published each quarter on the Member Hub including complaints data.
- A Member also referenced KPIs that remained red and suggested the Committee received updates on them every six months so there was good oversight; while there might be good reasons for them to remain red, it was important the Committee understood why.
- A Member suggested the Committee could have a role in a PIR (plan, implement, review) process, looking at reviewing changes in terms of housing maintenance; it was not about adding an additional layer of work

but ensuring Scrutiny knew what was taking place and could comment accordingly.

- A Member felt more could be done to proactively promote good work that was taking place and that it would be helpful if information about work carried out with contractors was cascaded to residents. Officers advised that tenants had been informed of key changes and would continue to receive key information via a residents' newsletter; staff had also worked closely with the Residents' Panel. The next community day would take place shortly; this was paid for by Morgan Sindall, who would also be providing a handyperson.
- A Member commented on the performance clinic report on the Member Hub, noted there were currently empty columns for Qs 2, 3 and 4, and suggested using data from the previous year so it was easier to see the trend. He felt it would be helpful for Overview and Scrutiny to look at the worst performing KPIs that appeared, ie those which were red and also heading in the wrong direction or not improving, and noted work would need to go into defining what was meant by worst performing. Officers understood Members' interest in KPIs and suggested Members considered which performance clinic reports in the Member Hub they would like further detail on, which staff could then provide along with background information; the governance team would then come up with a timetable.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report and would receive further information at a later date.

76. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That under Section 100(A)(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for agenda item 10 (Minute 77 refers) on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100A(3) and paragraph 3 (private financial or business information) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it was considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

77. CYBER SECURITY

The following item of an exempt nature was considered:
Committee received the restricted report on cyber security.

RESOLVED:

The Committee noted the report.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 September 2023

Meeting ended at 8.37 pm