

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
14 December 2023

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Thursday 14 December 2023 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber

PRESENT: Councillors L.Musk (Chair)

G.Michaelides, L.Crofton, C.Stanbury, R.Trigg, A.Nix,
D.Panter, B.Sarson, K.Thorpe, J.Cragg, G.Moore and
S.Tunstall

OFFICIALS S.Saunders, Legal Services Manager
PRESENT: R Baker, Executive Director (Finance and Transformation)
S. McDaid, Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood)
C. Cade, Governance Services Manager

78. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

The following substitution of Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules:

Cllr Julie Cragg for Cllr Terry Mitchinson
Cllr Stan Tunstall for Cllr Sunny Thusu
Cllr Gemma Moore for Cllr Michal Siewniak.

79. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mitchinson, Thusu and Siewniak.

80. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 were approved as a correct record.

81. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 9

There were no items of urgent business.

82. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

83. BUDGET CONSULTATION

The Committee received a verbal report from Cllr Michaelides, Chair of the Budget Task and Finish Group. He advised that the budget setting task and finish panel had met in October and December following the approval of the medium term forecasts by Cabinet. At the first session, members were given an overview of the forecast and the anticipated budget gap for the next three years, which was subsequently shared with all members at the annual budget seminar. There was a challenging budget gap ahead, and the group had discussed some of the newest pressures facing the Council including reductions in planning income and an ongoing increasing demand for temporary accommodation. In the meeting in December, members had discussed some of the proposals that would be included in the budget that Cabinet would consider in the new year. The panel had discussed possible opportunities with using community assets in different ways to generate income and recognised that the recently expanded Community Cabinet Panel would be the appropriate place to look at these in more detail as part of their consideration on the longer term strategy and the effectiveness of these assets. The panel had also heard some of the resident feedback from the budget question included in the community survey which was undertaken in summer, which would assist in reviewing the more detailed proposals once published. The papers for Cabinet would be published during December and the panel would then reconvene to review the detailed fees and charges proposals and full suite of savings proposals before making any recommendations to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC). It was agreed this update would be circulated to OSC members.

It was confirmed that the Council's budget proposals had not yet been announced. A Member asked if there was a target in respect of support to homeless people and it was agreed a response would be provided outside of the meeting.

The Chair noted that members who felt community assets and assets owned by the Council could be better used should feed in information via their group to the Community Cabinet Panel.

84. STREET SCENE TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

The Committee received the report from the Street Scene Task and Finish Group. Cllr Bernard Sarson, Chair of the group, advised that the panel had met four times in September and October and held very constructive discussions. He noted the collection of cardboard presented alongside blue lidded bins had been implemented earlier in December as a trial scheme at no additional cost to the Council and provided a summary of the other recommendations as set out in the report. He thanked all members of the group for their enthusiasm and ideas and also thanked officers for their help and advice during the discussions.

Members raised the following points:

- In respect of the bring back service, Saturday collections had been seen as too expensive. The group had discussed the feasibility of just doing collections on bank holiday weekends when pressure on recycling facilities was at its greatest and a member asked that this be considered. The Chair of the group noted Urbaser could be asked to carry out

collections on Tuesdays after a bank holiday. Officers agreed to look into this with the contract manager and would advise members accordingly.

- A Member asked about the cost of paper trays which had been very high. Officers advised collecting paper separately was about twice as valuable when compared to comingling it with other recyclables. The task and finish group felt it important to explore other possible receptacles for paper collections. Residents who no longer had the inner tray should still present their recycling, separated where possible.
- A Member asked about the progress of rolling out recycling for flats. Officers explained that progress had not been as swift as they would have liked; around half of the bins had been delivered to the locations where the pilot would take place and it was anticipated that they would be able to evaluate it in the first couple of months in the new year. Feedback on the pilot would be provided.
- A Member asked how residents would be advised about presenting cardboard alongside the blue lidded bins. Officers responded that there had been communications on social media and information was available on the website. The task and finish group had recommended a communications campaign in the spring around recycling, proper waste disposal etc which would reinforce the message about cardboard.
- A Member asked about recommendations which did not have dates attached. Officers said a review of recycling banks would result in a plan around the end of the current financial year which would be discussed with the Executive Member for Environment. Officers would feed back to OSC in approximately six months about progress with other recommendations which did not have a date. The Member asked if this would be a recurring agenda item and the Chair said officers would be asked to keep OSC informed of the outcome of the recommendations.
- A Member commented that Development Management Committee had recently noted S106 underspends in respect of refuse although this was ward-specific. Officers agreed to follow this up. The Chair asked that the budget task and finish group consider this.
- Members commended the thorough report and its clear recommendations.

The Committee agreed to recommend the Street Scene Task & Finish Group Report to Cabinet.

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

The Committee noted the dates as set out in the agenda, and noted that the Recruitment, Retention and Leaver Process Task and Finish Group would be rescheduled for January 2024.

86. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

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There was no other business.

Meeting ended at 8.10 pm