

Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
27 July 2017

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Thursday 27 July 2017 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

PRESENT: Councillors D.Bennett (Chairman)
B.Fitzsimon (Vice-Chairman)

T.Bailey, L.Brandon, A.Chesterman, L.Chesterman,
J.Cragg, P.Mabbott, T.Mitchinson, F.Thomson, K.Thorpe

ALSO PRESENT: R.Trigg (Executive Member, Governance, Community
Safety, Police and Crime Commissioner and
Corporate Property)

D.Goodson – Tenants’ Panel
B.Rhodes – Tenants’ Panel

N.Palmer – Finesse
A.Bedford - Finesse
E.Nicholls – Finesse
D.Sinclair – Finesse

OFFICIALS PRESENT: Executive Director (Housing and Communities) (S.Russell)
Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) (K.Ng)
Head of Community and Housing Strategy (S.Chambers)
Head of Policy and Culture (P.Underwood)
Governance Services Officer (S.Hulks)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN

It was noted that, at the Annual Council meeting on 22 May 2017, Councillor D.Bennett was appointed as Chairman and Councillor B.Fitzsimon was appointed as Vice Chairman of the Committee for the 2017-2018 municipal year.

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

Councillor L Chesterman declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 13 as a Member of Hertfordshire County Council and who was in attendance at the meeting when consultation on the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Proposal to

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Collaborate Officially with Herts Fire and Rescue (Minute 7 refers) was considered.

4. FINESSE MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 4

Members received a Powerpoint presentation by Emily Nicholls which provided them with information on the services provided at Stanborough Activity Centre and the roles of staff members. (A copy of the presentation can be found at [Z:\01_Modern.Gov_Agenda_Papers\SOSC_Social_Overview_and_Scrutiny_Committee\07_2017.07.27\SOSC - Stanborough Activity Centre \(Jul 17\).pptx](Z:\01_Modern.Gov_Agenda_Papers\SOSC_Social_Overview_and_Scrutiny_Committee\07_2017.07.27\SOSC - Stanborough Activity Centre (Jul 17).pptx)).

Members thanked Emily for her presentation and the enthusiasm that she showed. They felt that there were a lot of exciting initiatives.

Members asked whether there was any issue with the powerboat interfering with the fishing. They were advised that there was only a small amount of high speed travelling and, when this was going to happen, the bailiff and anglers were warned.

Members stated that there had been a lot of comments regarding the water quality and also rats. They asked how the perception could be dispelled.

They were advised that a great deal of work was done on water quality and testing was done on a regular basis. Members asked for details of this to be publicised.

Members commented that there had been a drop in the numbers for fishing. They were advised that work was being done on encouraging more 17-25 year olds to take part. There were good numbers for night fishing. An app was being used which gave information on catches, etc. Ideas to increase participation were welcomed.

A Member asked why so many services were run by a third party. Officers advised that an annual review took place at which the costs of those services contracted by Finesse Leisure were considered and other options. It had been decided at the last review to remain with the third party operators for the North kiosk and row boats. Finesse did not have any control over the leases for the Terranova restaurant and café or the High and Low Ropes Adventure Course, as these were managed by the Council directly.

Members asked about the depth of the lakes. They were advised that the South Lake was approximately 8 feet and the North Lake between 6 and 7 feet. The model boat lake on the north side of the Park was between 1.5 and 2 feet.

Members asked about the number of children who attended the summer club and how much it cost for attendance. They were advised that the daily cost was £45 and a weekly cost was £169. A reduction applied for siblings.

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A Member commented that it was important to get feedback on the Herts Parksapp that had been introduced. Officers advised that this was a new project and a lot of research had been undertaken. Feedback was being obtained in order to keep the project fresh.

It was noted that Yoga and HiiT were provided by staff at the Centre rather than third party providers.

Members were then presented with a report by Natalie Palmer which provided information on the services provided by Finesse and their achievements against targets.

The main points highlighted in the report were:

- financial recovery from the impact of the budget gyms had started.
- there had been a small decline in visitor numbers during the year, although Stanborough Park and King George V and other Playing Fields had gone against this trend and seen an increase in visitors.
- there had been a slight decline in the use of the Footgolf facility.
- the pitch and putt course was to be improved.
- there had been 34 Junior Park Runs held at King George V involving 3,400 children and 19 volunteers per run.
- a surplus of £22,000 had been realised overall which was £15,000 more than the previous year.
- £117,000 of savings had been made across the business.
- the Council was funding the partial refurbishment of the changing rooms at the Hatfield Swim Centre in 2017-2018. The Finesse Board would be discussing the release of some reserves to support this.

Members noted that the demise of football at King George V was due to the ending of the Sunday Football League as not enough teams were registering to make it viable. Members questioned whether there was any strategy in place to help the low paid. The Lead Member for Sport agreed to speak to Officers about this.

Comment was also made that there had been little consultation on the removal of the artificial pitches which went against the recommendations of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee that had looked at King George V Playing Fields and had commented at the time that consultation with local residents was important.

Members asked for further information regarding the intention to sell the lease on the Fairway Tavern to a local third party and they asked whether there would be an adverse effect on the services provided at Panshanger Golf course.

Officers replied that it was hoped that there would continue to be a good working relationship with the Golf society. They pointed out that the commercial lease on the Fairway Tavern had never been in the control of Finesse. Further

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information would be sought regarding the current situation and Members would be notified of any updates.

Members noted that there were often negative comments on social media about Hatfield Swim Centre and they asked what was being done to refute these.

Officers replied that this was frustrating as often the people making comments had not attended the Swim Centre for some time and did not have current knowledge. Work was being done on public relations for the Centre.

Officers went on to say that the facilities were old, not dirty and investment in refurbishment was planned. With 78,000 visitors annually there were pinch points at certain times and there was the need for investment. There needed to be management of expectations as focus would be on the showers, toilets and flooring. The rest of the Centre was in very good condition.

Members asked whether there had been any advertising of the Summer Play programmes at Moneyhole Lane and Digswell. They were told that the events had been advertised in the Council's Life Magazine.

Members also asked whether there had been any promotion of the refurbishment of the two gyms. They were advised that there had been marketing undertaken in January in readiness for completion of the refurbishment in February. There had been a 17% increase in memberships but the number of leavers had also increased resulting in a nett growth of 100 members.

Members felt that it would be of benefit to arrange a site visit to the Finesse sites so that they could see for themselves each of the locations. This would then allow them to be advocates for the services provided at each site. It was agreed that this would be arranged with Finesse.

It was noted that, despite the reduction in staff numbers, resources were still available to apply for outside funding. Partnership working was also proving beneficial such as the work with McMillan Nurses and the YMCA on offerings for people after cancer and with Sport England who were providing funding for the Parks app.

RESOLVED:

That the Finesse monitoring information for the final quarter of 2016/17 be noted.

5. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - QUARTER 4

Report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) providing details of the performance indicators that fell within the remit of the Committee.

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As previously agreed, only a few of the indicators were highlighted due to the high number now being reported. Members were invited to present questions on the data received.

- a request was made for an additional column to be added to the table of performance for the year that would show the previous year's target compared to the new target and this was agreed.
- could an alternative to candles at CW Entertainment be provided such as battery candles? This could be done but there was a risk that these would be removed. However, it should be noted that this restriction did not impact on the number of private hire parties held in Roller City and in Soft Play City.
- how many people were surveyed for performance indicators 37 and 38 and Officers agreed to find this out.
- there had been a reduction in the target for visitors to the museum due to the loss of the study room which only came back into school use in January 2017. As this had now been re-instated, the target would be reviewed and increased again.
- was there a risk of duplicating the performance indicator information at the Cabinet Housing Panel and this Committee? Officers confirmed that this same performance information was shared at the Cabinet Panel in addition to more detailed information on each service. It was noted that the Cabinet Housing Panel did not have scrutiny rights and could not do so as it was a Cabinet Panel, therefore this Committee was the right place for scrutinising performance. Where the Cabinet Panel identified issues that required further scrutiny, these should be referred to this Committee.
- Members thought that the average turnaround for void housing properties was good. However, there was some uncertainty about the relationship between void turnaround time and the number of homes vacant at a given time.
- Members requested that further information on this topic be brought back to this Committee at a later date.

RESOLVED:

That the information on the performance indicators for those services within the remit of this Committee be noted.

6. CAMPUS WEST ENTERTAINMENT ANNUAL REPORT

Report of the Executive Director (Resources, Environment and Cultural Services) and a presentation by the General Manager providing details of the work of CW Entertainment.

The report provided information on staffing levels, details of the most popular films, number of visitors, statistics on attendance for Roller City, Soft Play and Event Cinema and the usage of each of the methods of booking tickets. Information was also provided on the number of performances of the in-house Pantomime production.

Members were advised that the national average for attendance at the screening of a film was 31 against the CW Entertainment average of 36.4.

Members asked whether future reports could show the number of full time equivalent staff and the hours of opening. It was confirmed that the building was open to the public from 10.00am to 11.30pm seven days per week.

Members asked whether there were plans to work with a local restaurant to sell packages for both a film and dine out. Officers replied that they were trying to encourage visitors to use the Campus West dining options. However, there was the possibility of offering packages through the town centre BID link.

Members asked for gross profit figures over all activities. Officers advised that profit on food was 65% across the business, with some activities more profitable than others. For every £1.00 spent on film hire, approximately £2.65 was generated in income. Roller City and Soft Play were relatively cheap to run so there was little outlay compared to income. Income from all activities were used to reduce the contribution from the Council.

Members asked where the financial figures for Campus West were reported. They were advised that there was a cross party Campus West Cabinet Panel which received the figures. It was meeting every two months through 2017/18.

Concern was expressed at the lack of advertising to older people who were less likely to access the internet or social media for this type of information. Officers said that they occasionally used banner advertising in the Howard Centre, but this is expensive. There was a need to make advertising cost-effective which was why the internet was used most, although handbills were available to take away from the Box Office setting out the current film times. Members suggested that the Council advertise in sheltered housing schemes and other appropriate locations.

Members asked whether Art films were offered. They were advised that a lot of foreign films with English subtitles were offered and these were very popular with a select group. For this reason, they were usually shown in the 40 seat screen.

RESOLVED:

That the work and services of CW Entertainment be noted.

7. CONSULTATION ON THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER'S PROPOSAL TO COLLABORATE OFFICIALLY WITH HERTS FIRE AND RESCUE

Report of the Executive Director (Housing and Communities) providing information on a Consultation on the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) proposal to bring the governance of police and fire services within the same organisation.

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It was noted that there had been a unanimous vote by Hertfordshire County Council against the proposal.

Members noted that the consultation period was short and was to take place partly over the school holiday period. The Council was not a statutory consultee, but had the option to respond if desired.

Members raised the following points:

- there did not appear to be any financial savings
- there was not provision for adequate scrutiny of the Fire Service
- would the Ambulance Service be the next to be taken into the control of the PCC?
- the PCC could make a recommendation to the Secretary of State to go ahead with the proposal even if the responses to the consultation were not in favour
- it was understandable that the County Council would be against the proposal as it was a service that it provided which it would not want to lose and which had a substantial budget associated with it.

It was noted that the consultation would end on 14 August and any decision by the PCC would be submitted to the Secretary of State by 21 August 2017.

Members were advised that Hatfield Town Council had discussed the proposal and had voted to respond to the consultation stating that they did not support it.

A Member expressed concern that the Committee was being asked to comment on what was ultimately a big decision and he did not feel that he was in a position to comment without the full facts. He suggested that a recommendation should be made to the Cabinet that the Council would not give a response to the consultation.

Other Members felt that it was important for the Council to respond to the consultation with the following comments:

- they had no faith in the business case
- there was already a lot of joint working
- the proposal appeared to be more about making cuts
- there would be a transparency issue
- the Fire Brigade Union was against the proposal.

After further discussion, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:
(unanimously)

- (1) That the Cabinet be recommended that a response to the consultation should be submitted which opposed the proposal.

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- (2) That comment be made in the response about the short consultation period and the fact that it was taking place during the holiday period.
- (3) That delegated authority be given to Officers to prepare the wording of the response and to circulate it to Members of this Committee prior to its submission to the Cabinet.

(Note: The Chairman accepted this item as urgent as to delay consideration of the item would mean that, if the Council wished to respond to the consultation, time would not be available to do so if left until the next meeting).

(Note: Councillor L.Chesterman declared an interest in this item – Minute 6 refers).

Meeting Ended at 10.05pm
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