

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
COUNCIL – 18 MAY 2020
REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR (PUBLIC PROTECTION, PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE)

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020 – REPORT IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 6.3(C) OF THE CONSTITUTION

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Under Article 6.3(c) of the Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must report annually to the Council on their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate. This report is in accordance with that requirement.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That the Council note the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report together with recommendations for the Committee's future work programme.

3 FUNCTIONS AND ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

3.1 Local Government scrutiny is about reviewing decisions made by the Executive (Cabinet) and holding the authority to account. There are three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, including the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee (EOSC), which undertake policy review, policy development and scrutiny functions (conferred by Sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 [as amended]).

3.2 The main functions of EOSC are the conduct of comprehensive reviews and the scrutiny of the Council's policies, strategies or operations relating to the following areas (as outlined in the Part 3 of the Council's Constitution, Responsibility of Functions):

- Planning (except planning policy, development matters)
- Building control
- Transportation (excluding transportation policy development matters)
- Parking services
- Economic development
- Environmental health, pollution control, public health, climate change, animal welfare
- Licensing (except for those matters dealt with by a Committee or subcommittee set up under the Licensing Act 2003 or by the Hackney Carriage Committee)
- Environmental services, namely waste services, contract services, landscape and ecology services, fleet and workshop management

- 3.3 The Committee can make recommendations to Full Council and/or Cabinet in connection with the discharge of any functions.
- 3.4 The Committee takes a non-partisan approach, which brings with it a diverse and deeper understanding of the impact of the decisions being made on the residents of Welwyn Hatfield.

4 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The Membership of the Committee consists of eleven Council Members.

5 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

- 5.1 An annual work programme for the areas Members wish to scrutinise is set at the start of the municipal year in liaison with the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) and other relevant Officers.
- 5.2 Additional items for the work programme may be generated by:
- a) A request from Members (such as that which resulted in a presentation on Tree Maintenance, a presentation on Food Safety Inspections as well as an introductory report on the Council's Retail Strategy).
 - b) A request from Members under Consideration of Items for Scrutiny on the meeting agenda.
 - c) A Councillor Call for Action (CCfa) whereby a Councillor calls for debate and discussion at Committee on a topic of concern to their residents, such as the request for a viable water supply at Hatfield Hyde Cemetery which was resolved.
 - d) "Call in", whereby the Committee can monitor decision making by the Executive and "call in" a decision made by Cabinet but not yet implemented. No decisions made by Cabinet were called in this municipal year.
 - e) The creation of scrutiny sub-committees or a policy development review committees.

6 WORK OF THE COMMITTEE 2019/20

- 6.1 The Committee met five times during the municipal year 2019/20 and dealt with a range of issues and received a number of presentations from the service areas within its remit.
- 6.2 Standing items on the agenda considered at each meeting included the Performance Indicator Report which covered several service areas which carry out functions within the remit of this Committee.
- 6.3 In total, the Committee has considered numerous and wide-ranging topics over the year, and performed primarily an overview function in this respect.
- 6.4 There were annual reports, which included CP Plus Performance (2018-19), Food Safety Service Delivery Plan (2018-19), Health and Safety Service Plan (2020-21), Air Quality, Food Hygiene Inspections, Hackney Carriage Enforcement, John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance (2018-19) and Street Wardens.

- 6.5 The Committee was updated on various topics including the Garden Waste Service, Eat Out Eat Well, Tree Maintenance Work, Air Quality, Climate Change Sub-Group, Resilience and Noise – Operation Reprise and Balsam, Benefits of the Council’s Trees and Woodlands, and Retail Strategy.
- 6.6 Other topics presented at the Committee included Taxi Operation Enforcement Report, Review of the Standard Conditions for the Licensing of Hackney Carriage Vehicles, Regulatory Service Standards, Flats Recycling, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Economic Development Activity.
- 6.7 The Committee has been successful in making policy recommendations to Cabinet and/or Council which have been accepted and implemented, most notably Animal Activity Licensing Fees, the revised Licensing Policy 2020-25, revised Regulatory Service Standards, introduction of a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) for Duty of Care Fly-Tipping, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Revised Standard Conditions for the Licensing of Hackney Carriage Vehicles.
- 6.8 Following on from the interest in the Committees’ visit to the Danesbury Fernery in October 2018, a visit was arranged for the Committee to visit The Commons Local Nature Reserve with the Landscape and Ecology team in June 2019. Members had the opportunity to see the work that the friends group had carried out as well as the development-funded access improvements.

7 ITEMS FOR SCRUTINY

- 7.1 Scrutiny subcommittees are task and finish groups which undertake focused scrutiny on issues that Members feel need particular attention. They are an opportunity for Members to scrutinise a topic in much more depth. They can recommend improvements to the Council’s performance which are then considered by Cabinet.
- 7.2 As per the constitution, the Administration and Opposition Groups each have the right within the municipal year to have one scrutiny topic referred to a subcommittee.
- 7.3 There were no scrutiny subcommittees reporting to EOSC set up this municipal year.

8 POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT GROUP

As per the Constitution the Committee can decide that an issue or policy is reviewed and appoint a review group. Once it has formed its recommendations, EOSC then makes the recommendations to Cabinet.

8.1 Taxi Terms and Conditions Review Group

- 8.2 As reported last year, at the meeting of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2018 it was agreed that a Policy Review and Development Group would be set up to help research, formulate and consult on a revised hackney carriage policy in connection with wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles (WAVs).
- 8.3 During 2019/20 there were a further two meeting with the following membership: Councillors J.Cragg, M.Cowan, G.Hayes, K.Thorpe, S.Wrenn.
- 8.4 The revised standards for the licensing of Hackney Carriage Vehicles were presented to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the January 2019 meeting.

An extensive consultation of over 1000 consultees was carried out including two public meetings held in late March 2019.

8.5 Following the consultation, the policy was updated as necessary and the final report then went to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2020 where there were five public questions on the matter. The revised standards for the licensing of Hackney Carriage vehicles were subsequently recommended to Council for adoption, with the new policy due to be implemented on 1 April 2020.

8.6 In summary, the policy development and review group ensured a robust review of the standard conditions for Hackney carriage vehicles, with the result that the taxi fleet in Welwyn Hatfield would be more accessible to wheelchair users and, with improved livery, more recognisable to the public.

8.7 **Climate Change Sub Group**

8.8 The Climate Change Sub Group was set up at the Extra Ordinary Council meeting when a Climate Emergency was declared on 19 June 2019.

8.9 The cross party group consists of six members: M.Holloway (Chairman), E.Boulton, F.Marsh, H.Quenet, J.Weston and S.Wrenn.

8.10 The group is supported by Officers from a number of service areas and has met three times. A report detailing the work of the group to date is due to go to Council in March 2020.

8.11 The aim of the group is far reaching, primarily to help formulate policy and activities to reduce the Councils carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and also to review and develop the Councils Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, of which preparations are underway.

8.12 A staff representative group was also set up in January 2020 to ensure that each of the nine service areas of the Council were represented and that the climate emergency can be “championed” within each service area and their work. This group will meet quarterly.

8.13 The cross party group also agreed (along with the Streetscene Mobilisation Group) to the rolling out of further flat recycling in Welwyn Hatfield, as a phased approach.

9 **COMMITTEE’S WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

9.1 The draft programme for municipal year 2020/21 is attached in Appendix A of this report.

9.2 Members of the Committee can, during the course of the year, add items within the remit of the Committee (as outlined in section 5 of this report) that they wish to be considered and discussed.

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