

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
30 July 2024

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Tuesday 30 July 2024 at 7.30 pm in the Council Chamber

PRESENT: Councillors D.Jones (Chairman)
B.Sarson (Vice-Chairman) and L.Chesterman (Vice-Chairman)

G.Michaelides, L.Crofton, T.Mitchinson, L.Musk,
D.Panter, K.Gardner, H.Goldwater and R.Platt

OFFICIALS R.Baker, Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)
PRESENT: S.McDaid, Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change)
S.Saunders, Legal Services Manager
R.Misir, Senior Democratic Services Officer

At the start of the meeting, a minute's silence was observed in memory of the victims of the Southport tragedy.

1. APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Adrienne Nix for whom Councillor Helena Goldwater attended as a substitute, and from Councillor Tim Rowse for whom Councillor Russ Platt attended as a substitute.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 March 2024 were approved as a correct record.

3. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 7

There were no items of urgent business.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

There were no declarations of interest.

5. ACTION STATUS REPORT

The Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) introduced the paper which summarised the actions agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(OSC) last year, recommendations it had made to Cabinet and the current implementation status.

OSC noted the Action Status report.

6. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024/25

The Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) introduced the report which set out the outcomes of the OSC workshop in June 2024 where proposed topics for the current year were discussed. Officers had drafted the scoping and scoring documents based on those discussions. Prior to the publication of the OSC agenda pack, officers had met with the OSC Chair and Vice Chairs to ensure the proposed draft work programme was in line with what members had agreed at the workshop and had made some changes as a result. The report proposed that some items would be the subject of an individual report and others would be considered by task and finish panels where draft terms of reference had been set out. The report also included a draft work programme for OSC for the municipal year which included standard topics to be considered by the committee such as health and crime.

On the topic of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), a query was raised about whether this would be scrutinised by a task and finish panel. The Chair advised that six topics had been considered for task and finish panels but realistically a maximum of five could take place in any one year so it had been decided HMOs would be the subject of a single report; there was some uncertainty about the legal status and future of HMOs and it was likely the new government would be looking at changes in legislation. A member suggested this might be a reason to have an HMO task and finish group that could look at any legislative changes. Officers advised there had been a discussion about this and given proposed changes to planning reform, it had been felt that a single report to be presented at the next meeting could inform any potential consultation responses (whereas a task and finish group would take place over a period of months before reporting to OSC and then Cabinet).

A member asked whether this meant there would be scope for a review task and finish panel next year to react to changes in legislation. The Chair agreed HMOs were an important topic and once the report was received OSC could decide how it would approach the subject. Other committee members expressed support for this position and noted the importance of a solid evidence base as a starting point.

A member asked what research would be carried out to inform the HMO report. Officers advised the report would cover both planning and enforcement and would be presented by staff from the relevant Council departments based on their evidence and knowledge. The report would provide details of the planning framework and level of influence the Council has over the development/conversion to HMOs, the enforcement powers the Council has for HMOs, an overview of the private accredited landlord scheme, and the procedures in place for identifying HMOs and numbers of registered landlords. A

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member urged those present to report any illegal HMOs of which they were aware.

A member understood the grounds maintenance contract was being renegotiated with the current contractor; she had asked for a copy of the current contract and had not yet received it. Officers confirmed they would share the contract with her and advised that it was not being renegotiated.

A member asked whether information from health scrutiny at Hertfordshire County Council was applied to reporting in the borough as she had challenged Hertfordshire about issues such as pharmacies not fulfilling repeat prescriptions and access to urgent care and would like to see that reflected in the Welwyn Hatfield health scrutiny report. Officers confirmed this could be included.

OSC agreed the work programme for 2024.

Meeting ended at 7.50 pm