

Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee
12 July 2012

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held on Wednesday 12 July 2012 at 7.30pm at Campus West, Welwyn Garden City.

PRESENT: Councillors D.Bennett (Chairman)
S.Johnston (Vice-Chairman)

J.Beckerman, L.Chesterman, M.Cook, I.Dean, K.Langley,
L.Mendez, L.Page (substituting for D.Hughes), K. Pieri

ALSO PRESENT: F.Thomson, T.Kingsbury

ALSO PRESENT J.Parry (Tenants' Panel Representative)
BY INVITATION: C.Rogers (Tenants' Panel Representative)
J.Lievesley (Assistant Director Community Commissioning)

OFFICIALS Director (Strategy and Development) (C.Conway)
PRESENT: Head of Policy and Culture (P.Underwood)
Environmental Health Officer (P.Hill)
Principal Planning Officer (P.Everard)
Finesse Leisure, Director of Operations (S.Trower)
Finesse Leisure, Director of Finance (P.Nye)
Committee Manager (S.Hulks)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN:

It was noted that Councillors D.Bennett and S.Johnston were appointed as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee at the Annual Council meeting until such time as their successors are appointed.

2. SUBSTITUTION OF MEMBERS:

The following substitutions of Committee Members had been made in accordance with Council Procedure Rules 19-22:

Councillor L.Page for Councillor D.Hughes

3. APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D.Hughes.

4. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS:

Councillor I. Dean declared a personal interest in Item 10 as she is a member of the Finesse Board.

Councillor S. Johnston declared a personal interest in Item 9 as she was a County Councillor.

Before the item on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy was started, Councillor Bennett took the opportunity, on behalf of the Committee, to thank Matt Rayner and his team for the work that had been done to make the Ten Days of Sport and Culture and the Torch Relay such a success. Paul Underwood agreed to pass on the message.

6. DRAFT HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY:

The Committee received a presentation from Jess Lievesley, Assistant Director, Community Commissioning, Herts County Council. He informed Members that comments on the strategy were welcome, but that the closing date for these was 16 July.

The presentation showed that the strategy was to be evidence based, robust and transparent. Its aim was to help direct some of the spending in Hertfordshire which stood at £2.7bn for 2011-2012. Value for money and positive outcomes were required. Partnership working was needed involving local authorities, the health service, Education, Police, Probation and Fire and Rescue, amongst others.

Members were advised that the eight priorities that had been identified were selected as they were a priority to more than one partner and change could be effected.

Priorities had been so far identified as:

Long term conditions – for example heart conditions, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Smoking – Hertfordshire previously had one of highest incidences of smoking, but the number of smokers was now below the national average. However, there was an issue with the numbers of young women starting smoking.

Alcohol and Drugs – the impact of alcohol and drugs misuse was seen in crime and disorder figures, problems in town centres and sport and leisure facilities becoming an area for drug and alcohol misuse at night. For every £1 spent in this area, there was a guaranteed return of £2.50.

Obesity – if obesity remains unchecked, by 2020, the whole of the health budget could be spent on this problem.

Carers – if all carers were to quit, the cost would be approximately £2.2bn. Proper care for carers could result in fewer people being put in to residential care.

Mental Health (including Dementia) – there was discussion about whether Dementia should be treated as a separate priority as it was recognised that it was a problem in its own right. 150,000 people in Hertfordshire suffer from mental health problems and 1 in 4 people will suffer at some time, be it as a mental health patient or family or friend of a patient.

Troubled Families – currently 1,350 families in Hertfordshire need help. Work is required to prevent additional families becoming part of this group.

Learning Disabilities – Hertfordshire has a higher percentage of residents with learning disabilities than would be expected due to the closure of institutions which had housed many people from London who had now been moved in to the community. Life expectancy had also increased which impacted on the numbers.

Members were advised that there was information on the website which showed the evidence that had been used to form the draft strategy.

The Committee was advised that the strategy would not be delivered by the Health and Wellbeing Board, instead it would be delivered by district councils, GPs and other partners. An example was given of the work that had been done by Waltham Forest on reducing obesity by refusing planning permission for fast food outlets within 400 yards of schools.

Members commented that there had been a lot of work done by the PCT towards reducing obesity, increasing smoking cessation and reducing teenage pregnancies but that the outcomes of the work had not been widely publicised. They wished to be informed of the outcomes of the work from this strategy and partnership.

Members were invited to make comments on or highlight omissions from the strategy either through the website or by informing Nick Long who was preparing comments on behalf of the council. The Committee was reminded that responses were due by 16 July.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

7. FINESSE LEISURE MONITORING REPORT - QUARTER 4 (2011-12):

The Committee received a report which provided information on the Quarter 4 performance of Finesse.

There had been positive results for the year with an overall surplus, increased income and reduced management fees.

Members asked about the 5-a-side pitches at King George V as there had been problems with noise and a statutory nuisance order had been issued resulting in the pitches being closed.

There was sympathy for both residents and footballers, particularly the young players. There was also concern that, should there be no revenue from the pitches, the funding arrangement which had been made to provide the pitches could not be repaid.

It was felt that the use of the pitches by young people or disabled sports people could be agreed with the residents with a reduction in the opening hours.

Officers advised that consideration was being given to several options. Discussions would take place with residents regarding a proposed schedule of training for young people so that not all of the pitches were in use all of the time. It was felt that use from 5pm to 8pm Monday to Thursday from October to mid-March might be acceptable as this was the period when gardens were used less often and the nuisance might be lesser.

Finesse officers stated that the noise generated did not differ whether it was younger or older users.

Members emphasised that, before decisions on the way forward were made, residents must be consulted as to not do so would create more problems. This was acknowledged.

The Committee was advised by Finesse that the funding arrangement was still being repaid despite the closure of the facility.

Members asked whether it was feasible to install noise barriers. They were advised that noise barriers could work for some noise, but that they would not be suitable in this instance.

Councillor Dean assured Members that a solution would be found as there was no way that such a good facility could remain unused.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

Councillor Bennett announced that it was the last meeting Philip Nye would be attending as he was moving on to another job. He thanked Philip on behalf of the Committee for his work over the last eight years and wished him good luck in his new career.

8. WELWYN HATFIELD SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY:

Members received a presentation which gave details of the draft Sports Facilities Strategy and the Action Plan for 2012 – 2016.

The Committee thanked officers for the work that had been done and they commented that it was a good document which was ideal for the legacy of London 2012.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and commended to Cabinet and to the Cultural Consortium for final approval through the Alliance Board.

9. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY UPDATE:

Members received a report which informed them that equality objectives had been published and an action plan prepared.

The objectives are:

- To be a fair and accessible employer
- To demonstrate the importance of equality and diversity issues when procuring and managing services
- To actively engage and work in partnership with our communities
- To deliver excellent customer service to everyone we serve

RESOLVED:

To recommend to Cabinet that the Equality Objectives and Action Plan, as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report, be endorsed.

10. PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT:

The Committee received a presentation and report detailing the Performance Indicator data collected for services within the remit of the committee.

Members asked whether PI156 included people in the Women's Refuge. As the accommodation is provided by another partner, these figures are not included.

It is expected that the introduction of universal credit and other changes to the benefits system will have an impact on PI252.

Officers advised that an amount of £30,000 had been received from government which Cabinet had agreed to pay to the Citizens' Advice Bureau to pay for a debt adviser for preventative work.

The Committee discussed whether there should be incentives offered to

tenants to leave properties clean when they move out. Various schemes were being considered.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

11. COMMITTEE OVERVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13:

The following item to be added in September:

Helping young people into work – Chris Conway and Councillor Bennett to arrange two or three speakers.

A health service update to be presented at each meeting.

Members asked for a briefing on the new benefits regulations. Officers advised that this was being looked at and it was possible that a presentation would be made to the whole council.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

Councillor Bennett announced that this was to be the last meeting for James Parry and he thanked him for his input and involvement. James thanked everyone and stated that committees are only as good as their members and this committee was very good.

Meeting ended 9.35pm

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