

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 29 June 2010

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny report to Council – June 2010

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Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, ext.4246



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from April 2010 to the present be noted.

Report.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting – 15 April 2010.

1. At the April meeting, the Committee considered a call-in of a decision by the Housing Portfolio Holder Report on the release of a restrictive covenant on 35 Denny Avenue, Waltham Abbey. This was to vary a restrictive covenant between the Council and the owner of the property, to grant permission for either its current use or as a privately rented shared accommodation. The meeting noted that this same property had its planning application turned down but that they still had time to appeal to the Secretary of State. The Committee was careful not to confuse the two strands of Planning and the Housing Covenant for this property, as they had to be treated separately in law.

2. After a long and involved debate the Committee agreed to refer the decision back to the Portfolio Holder who would re-consider the variation of the covenant only once the outcome of any planning appeal (if an appeal had been lodged), had been settled.

3. The Committee then went on to consider and agree the final report of the Sustainable Communities Task and Finish Panel and the annual Overview and Scrutiny report that would go to the April Council meeting.

4. They then considered several reports that came from the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel. The Committee considered and agreed six reports all seeking minor changes to terms of reference for committees or policy and regulations. Four of these reports also went to the full council meeting in April for their consideration. These reports were; i) review of officer delegation; ii) Licensing Committee (Terms of Reference); iii) Audit and Governance Committee – Terms of Reference; and iv) Housing Appeals and Review Panel – Terms of Reference.

5. Finally they looked at their future work programme and decided to accept a request from 'Connectplus25' who are responsible for the M25 works to attend their September 2010 meeting and discuss their long standing operations within the district boundaries.

6. They also considered a proposal to scrutinise the powers of the utilities to dig up roads and inconvenience the travelling public and cause harm to the environment and local businesses. However, on consideration it was thought that this fell more neatly into the purview of the Highways Panel and asked that it be referred there.

7. Another proposal was for scrutinising the BT Broadband access and speeds in the local area, as this had implications about social inclusion and economic development. It was agreed that the Committee should ask BT and other providers to one of their meetings to explain the differences in speeds and availability and to find out if any solutions could be found.

8. The Committee then considered the Cabinet's request to look into the Council's approach to Children's Services and its provision throughout the district. They agreed that this would need a Task and Finish Panel to be set up if this was to be considered in the depth it would need.

9. Other work that was agreed to do was to ask for a report from the legal section explaining the law and background on land covenants as this proved to be confusing when the Committee considered the call-in. It was thought that this could fit into the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel work programme. Once this report had been considered then it would be there for all Councillors as background information.

10. They also asked that the Planning Standing Panel and the Highways Panel be asked to look at damage that was caused by developers to the highway infrastructure during the course of construction work. The Committee thought that this could be tackled in two ways, the Planning Panel to look at possible conditions to be added to planning applications and the Highways Panel to look at enforcement of remedial work to the highway if damaged by construction work.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meeting - 1st June 2010

11. At their first meeting of the new municipal year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a presentation from Stephen Jones from London Underground Limited who gave a quick run through LUL's current plans for their stations in our district and informed us that they were looking at the opening times of the ticket offices after studying the ticket purchasing pattern at the various stations. They were also in the middle of planning for the upcoming Olympic Games and were doing modelling work to have a plan in place by 2011. He would come back at a later date and enlarge on the detail once they had established it. He answered a lot of questions from the attending councillors and promised to chase down answers that he could not respond to at that time. These answers put in the Members Bulletin.

12. The Committee then went on to consider and agree the revision of the Terms of Reference for the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel. They also authorised the Constitution and Members Services Standing Panel to report directly to the Council at the end June regarding the Council's amended petitioning scheme including the new provisions for the 'e-petition scheme'. This was due to the time constraints imposed on us by the government.

13. The Committee also considered a consultation document from the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel who had made their recommended response to a Defra consultation on landfill. This was agreed and the consultation document was returned to Defra.

14. The Committee considered its work programme and agreed that two extra items be handed over to the Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel. One was to consider how the Council made its appointments to various committees and bodies at the start of the year and also to review the procedures for the appointment of the Chairman and Vice Chairman for the year. The second item was for the Panel to study the opportunities for setting up assistants to portfolio holders so as to assist with portfolio holder duties and aid succession planning.

15. Finally the Committee appointed members, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen to the various Standing Panels and the Task and Finish Panel for the year; they reviewed the Cabinet agenda and discussed the upcoming presentation from the Local Strategic Partnership. As their work covered such diverse subjects, it was thought that members should be given an idea of what areas the LSP would cover at the meeting so that they could frame their questions around that.