

## REPORT OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

### Overview & Scrutiny Board comments to Cabinet

Using its Constitutional powers under the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Overview and Scrutiny Board has made a number of recommendations to Cabinet.

Cabinet is recommended to respond to these.

### Havering Volunteer Centre (HVC)

Cabinet agreed to consider the recommendations listed during upcoming strategic meetings.

1. That the HVC be given a longer term lease on their current location.
2. The Council should not ask the HVC to leave their current premises for a period of at least 18 months.
3. Whilst noting the remedial action taken by senior officers, the Board condemns as unacceptable the previous poor treatment and language used by some Council officers when communicating with HVC staff.
4. Further detail should be given on the specific level of the rent increase to be applied. This should be at a lower level than current market rents.
5. Details of the proposed alternative site for the HVC that has been identified by the Council, including levels of associated costs, should be supplied to the HVC as a matter of urgency. The Board finds it unacceptable that the HVC should have been given four weeks' notice to leave without a costed alternative being provided. The Board notes that this position has now been addressed.
6. The possibility of a charitable donation of premises to HVC should be explored.
7. Any underspend in the community engagement budget should be passed to the HVC.
8. Cabinet should make clear its vision for volunteering/the voluntary sector in Havering and where the HVC sits within this.

9. The Council should make proactive efforts to obtain increased funding and support for the voluntary sector from local businesses and partner organisations.
10. Cabinet should commit to continue current funding (as a minimum) for the HVC.
11. Information should be provided as to whether any other tenancies of voluntary organisations are at risk due to the position with the HVC premises.
12. If Council funding arrangements allow, certainty of funding for the HVC should be given for a period of at least three years.
13. The Council should explore the introduction of a neighbourhood plan for Romford as this would allow a Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy to fund the HVC.
14. Cabinet is asked to support the view of the Board that the HVC provides good value for money.

#### Responses:

The Overview and Scrutiny Board reviewed the council's HVC funding and made recommendations, which were discussed by the Cabinet. The Cabinet agreed with most recommendations but had reservations about requiring Cabinet Members to attend every meeting and providing questions in advance. They emphasised the need for practicality and clarity in roles, noting that officers handle operational details while Cabinet Members focus on policy. The cabinet committed to considering all recommendations thoroughly and reporting back by July.

They also discussed the importance of timely report submissions and the need for effective training to differentiate between officer and cabinet member responsibilities.

#### Agreed to

- Conduct a deep dive into the funding and role of the HVC during upcoming strategy meetings.
- Provide a formal response to the HVC on the Council's decision within the next 4 weeks
- Report back to the public on which scrutiny recommendations have been accepted or rejected, by July Cabinet meeting.
- Work with the scrutiny chairs to develop a protocol for Cabinet Member attendance and provision of questions in advance.

- Provide training to clarify the differentiation between officer and Member responsibilities in the scrutiny process.

### Scrutiny Process and Related Issues

Cabinet agreed to recommendations 2, 3, 4, 6 & 7

1. The relevant Cabinet Member should be required to attend each meeting of the Board or Sub-Committees where there is an item relevant to their portfolios. **Not agreed.**
2. All Cabinet responses to scrutiny recommendations or comments should be included as an agenda item at the next scrutiny meeting. **Agreed.**
3. Comments and recommendations to Cabinet should be presented at the Cabinet meeting by the Chairman and Vice-Chair of the Board or relevant Sub-Committee. **Agreed.**
4. Cabinet responses to scrutiny comments on called-in decisions should be circulated to all members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board as well as other Members supporting the call-in. **Agreed.**
5. Cabinet supports the Board's request for scrutiny reports to be received two weeks ahead of publication as this will facilitate earlier pre-meets and general consideration of the material. **Not agreed.**
6. That Cabinet commends the Overview and Scrutiny Board reviewing the work it undertook over the past year, and its ongoing efforts to make the scrutiny process as effective as possible for residents. **Agreed.**
7. That a protocol be developed for working practices between Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Board including, but not limited to, the issues outlined in the recommendations above. **Agreed.**

Responses:

The Cabinet is content with five of the seven recommendations around the scrutiny process but has reservations about requiring Cabinet Members to attend each meeting.

The Cabinet suggests a formal invitation with clarification of the reason for attendance and advance questions from the committee.

The Cabinet discusses the practicality of providing reports two weeks ahead of publication and the challenges of meeting tight time scales.

The Cabinet agrees to make every effort to provide reports in a timely manner but cannot commit to it being possible every time.

Final summary;

The Chair concluded the discussion, agreeing to take forward for discussion the recommendations for HVC and the scrutiny process.

The Cabinet emphasised the importance of effective scrutiny and the need for practical arrangements to support it.

The Cabinet agreed to work with the scrutiny committee and other stakeholders to ensure a balanced and effective scrutiny process.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to report back on the recommendations and continue working on the deep dive work.