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## **General Public Services and Community Engagement Committee MINUTES**

**Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Tuesday, 17 March 2026 from 7.30 - 8.10 pm**

**Present:** Councillors Sarah Nelmes (Chair), Ian Campbell, Stephen King, Louise Price, Kevin Raeburn, Paul Rainbow and Narinder Sian

**Officers in Attendance:**

Shivani Dave, Partnerships & Inclusion Manager  
Emma Lund, Senior Committee Officer  
Emma Sheridan, Associate Director for Environment

**External in Attendance:**

Michaela Foster Osborne (Co-CEO Services) and Karen Watkin (Co-CEO Operations), Home-Start Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere

### **36 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Christopher Alley, Lisa Hudson and Steve Drury. Councillor Louise Price substituted for Councillor Steve Drury.

### **37 MINUTES**

The minutes of the General Public Services and Community Engagement Committee held on 13 January 2026 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **38 NOTICE OF URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

### **39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **40 PRESENTATION BY HOME-START WATFORD, THREE RIVERS AND HERTSMERE**

The Committee received a presentation from Michaela Foster Osborne (Co-CEO Services) and Karen Watkin (Co-CEO Operations) on the work of Home-Start Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere, a charity which provided non-judgemental and supportive early intervention to families with at least one child aged under 5 in order to prevent families going into crisis and help ensure that children could reach their potential.

The presentation covered the background and work of the charity; the support which was available; the complexity of needs for Three Rivers families; a case study; how the charity

contributed to meeting the needs of the Council Plan; and the challenges faced by the charity in providing support to families, particularly funding challenges.

The slides from the presentation can be found here: [Presentation - Home-Start Watford Three Rivers and Hertsmere.pdf](#)

Members noted that the charity was open to referrals from a variety of sources, including professional services such as Health Visitors, Family and Womens' Centres and sexual health clinics, as well as self-referrals. Officers undertook to provide referral information to Members so that this could be shared with any resident who may require help (referral information can be found here: <https://home-startwatford.org.uk/referrals/> ).

Members heard about the work of the volunteers, who were required to be parents themselves to provide home visiting support. Volunteers also provided family group work support, counselling support and community buddy support. It was noted, and welcomed, that 45% of volunteers came from the Three Rivers district.

For home visiting support, volunteers were carefully matched to work with families for 6 months. The role required a commitment to visit for 2 to 3 hours per week. The counselling service was available to all supported families, as well as volunteers, and removed the traditional barriers to counselling by providing the service at very low cost in accessible venues where childcare was provided. The Community Buddy service allowed an opportunity for families who had benefitted from Home-Start support to provide similar support to others in the community, although it was also open to other volunteers.

The impact of services was measured using a recognised outcome measuring tool and showed that 97% of families had made progress in 3 or more outcome areas.

In relation to funding it was noted that the majority (62%) of the charity's income came from grant funding. However, sources of grant funding were limited and involved a high level of competition, so that funding for the charity was quite volatile. Cuts to statutory services had also increased the demand for community-based support, and there were pressures from rising operational costs. Members were encouraged to champion the work of the charity, facilitate connections with partner organisations, and consider the funding of early prevention (rather than remedial intervention at a later stage) when making budget decisions.

In response to a question it was noted that whilst funding was provided to the charity (at differing levels) through service level agreements with the three district councils (Watford, Three Rivers and Hertsmere), no direct funding was provided by Hertfordshire County Council.

The Chair commended the valuable work of Home-Start and thanked Home-Start for their presentation.

#### **41 PUBLIC HEALTH FUNERALS POLICY**

The Associate Director for Environment presented a report which recommended the adoption of a Public Health Funeral Policy. The Committee noted that public health funerals were a statutory duty of local authorities; the proposed policy provided a framework for meeting this legal obligation and set out how the process of a public health funeral would be handled. As the report proposed a formal council policy it would require Full Council approval, in addition to the approval of the Committee.

The work of the Bereavement Officer, who performed a difficult role in often sensitive circumstances, was commended.

Members supported the policy, noting that it also respected the faith and/or culture of the deceased. The Associate Director for Environment confirmed that where specific wishes of

the deceased were known, officers sought to ensure they were accommodated. Additionally, an officer would attend the funeral in cases where it was known that no other attendees would be present.

RESOLVED:

That the General Public Services and Community Engagement Committee agrees that:

1. the proposed Public Health Funerals Policy be adopted and added to the Policy Register for review every three years;
2. the professional genealogists are not used at this time; and
3. authority to make any minor amendments required to this policy be delegated to the Associate Director for Environment in consultation with the Lead Member for Community Engagement, Public Safety and Housing.

#### **42 BUDGET MANAGEMENT REPORT P10 - GPS&CE**

The Associate Director for Environment presented the budget monitoring report for period 10 (to end-January 2026).

The comprehensive had already been presented to the Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 9 March 2026 which sought approval to a change in the Council's 2025 - 2029 medium-term financial plan. The report before the Committee set out the position in respect of the service areas within the Committee's remit.

The Associate Director for Environment confirmed that all budget areas were on track, and there were no concerns at the current time.

RESOLVED:

That the report is noted.

#### **43 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee noted its future work programme.

With regard to the motion relating to timely and inclusive burial provision which the Committee had supported at its January meeting, the Associate Director for Environment advised that it was intended that the requested report would be brought to the Committee's September meeting. Whilst the motion had sought a report within 6 months, this was not possible due to the timeframes of the committee's meetings. However, work to review processes had commenced and officers from the Environmental Protection Team had met with Partnerships & Inclusion officers to discuss engagement with a wide range of communities over the summer.

Committee Members were invited to notify outside the meeting any further matters which were not included in the work programme but which required the Committee's input.

**CHAIR**