

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING
18 SEPTEMBER 2018

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

Present

Cllr John Ward (Chairman)
Cllr Pat Frost (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Carole Cockburn
Cllr Patricia Ellis

Cllr Paul Follows
Cllr Michael Goodridge
Cllr Richard Seaborne
Cllr Liz Townsend
Adrian Waller

Cllr Bob Upton (substitute)
Terry Daubney (substitute)

Apologies

Cllr Tony Gordon-Smith and Miss Brenda Greenslade

Also Present

Councillor Carole King and Councillor Andy MacLeod

20. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 July 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 2.)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tony Gordon-Smith and Brenda Greenslade.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

There were no declarations in relation to items on the agenda.

23. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4.)

There were no questions.

24. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions.

25. TACKLING HOUSING FRAUD PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda item 6.)

The Committee welcomed the report, appreciated the work carried out by the team and agreed the recommendations with the two additional comments:

- The Committee wished to demonstrate its appreciation of the work carried out by the new dedicated post; and

- Waverley's determination and efforts in tackling housing fraud be highlighted and publicised.

26. OCKFORD RIDGE UPDATE (Agenda item 7.)

The Committee received a detailed update on progress with the Ockford Ridge redevelopment. During the discussion, it was noted that the demolition was completed ahead of anticipated time; site D was the largest with 37 units; commendations from residents were received after the initial difficulties and some concerns; and a formal opening ceremony to be held on Thursday 20 September, with the Mayor.

It was put on record that the service and the committee were proud of the progress made while observing that the experiences and lessons learnt must be used to shape any outstanding issues and future work. There was a need to continue to improve consultation and identify more effective ways to engage with local residents and partners with a view to review the consultation/timings with a bigger sample in future.

The Committee understood that some of the earlier contractor related issues were beyond the Council's direct control but all residents affected were personally visited by the Service Head, and a possible recompense option was being explored.

Following the discussion, the Committee agreed the recommendations set out in the report and praised the Council's efforts in delivering the project.

27. ANNUAL SCRUTINY REPORT (Agenda item 8.)

The Committee welcomed the first Annual Scrutiny Report (ASR) incorporating reflections, Members' feedback and the foreword by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Coordinating Board, Cllr John Ward.

The report identified that the new scrutiny arrangements, which came into effect in 2017, had been implemented effectively with constructive recommendations stemming from various Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee meetings and Scrutiny reviews. The work had been welcomed by the Executive and all formal recommendations had been accepted, demonstrating the value Scrutiny had added to the work of the Council.

The ASR reviewed and reflected on the first year, invited further feedback and highlighted successes as well as areas that could be improved. The Committee noted that the ASR report was a result of an idea which originated from a previous working group and the first ASR demonstrated a robust and efficient follow-through. If any criticism, at all, was required, it was that reports could be shorter to focus minds.

Following the discussion, the Committee endorsed the report and referred the report to the Coordinating Board.

28. RENT SETTING POLICY (Agenda item 9.)

The Committee welcomed the report providing a clear framework for setting and reviewing rent levels for all Council homes. The policy ensured that the Council adhered to the relevant legislation and regulations when setting rents for Housing Revenue Account properties and would run alongside the Council's Housing Strategy.

During the discussion, it was noted that the mechanism and details to evaluate the 'market rent', and the details about 'estate maintenance and improvements' needed to be included in the final version of the report.

After the discussion, it was agreed that the revised version would be brought back to the Committee with the following changes:

- To add a technical glossary to explain various terms;
- To amend a phrase "may" to "flexibility" in relation to charging rents; and
- To explain what market values were the Council charging the residents and how were they calculated.

29. TENANCY AND ESTATES PROGRESS UPDATE (Agenda item 10.)

The Committee noted the report highlighting progress of the Tenancy and Estates team following a number of changes regarding provision of service and team structure since 2017.

After a comprehensive briefing and discussion, the Committee noted the recommendation and highlighted that a new structure document with details about who does what under the new arrangements be sent to Committee; and a better way forward to deal with the cost and responsibilities associated with third party communal areas must be explored and reported back.

30. OVERVIEW OF DAMP IN COUNCIL HOMES (Agenda item 11.)

The Committee noted the report setting out the Housing Service's draft strategy for responding to reports of damp, mould and condensation in Council homes supporting the corporate priorities of People, Place and Prosperity.

The Committee agreed that the final version be brought back to the Committee to include an action plan together with graphic/flash card element added with a view to improve the impact and engagement aspects.

31. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT Q1 (Agenda item 12.)

The Chief Executive, Tom Horwood, introduction the item. He highlighted that the new overarching performance report provided broader focus, covered a range of important Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), dataset and corporate snapshot that would be useful for the senior managers and the Overview and Scrutiny. He emphasised that this was a first version that could be tweaked in light of any feedback and suggestions and needed to be fit for purpose.

During a comprehensive, constructive and frank discussion, a range of views, underlying themes and comments were made. The Chairman invited the Committee members to cogitate over the new format – values, charts, colour, information provided and the ability to understand the material provided. For example, at a practical level, did the new formatting, colours, information and pie charts make sense to the Committee Members?

A Councillor stated that she was not happy with the new format of the report as the Committee used to receive such style of report many years ago, and had to ask to receive the kind of reports which was relevant to do their job - smaller focussed reports with more relevant information and details to avoid losing the emphasis on monitoring and overseeing the service delivery for the residents.

Pages 119, 101, 104 and 110 were cited as perhaps not being very clear and thus created many queries. For instance, what did the red actually mean in each area - bad, good or both depending on what and how was an area being measured? Did the Members and others fully understand what these values, colours and jargons were? Were up/down arrows good or bad? Should there not be a long term and short term comparison and trend?

It was mentioned that there needed to be a serious consideration of the target audiences - their needs, roles and aims (Would one identical report be suitable for Senior Managers, Executive as well as the Scrutiny that probably had different approaches, aims and priorities?). Could the competing priorities be realistically balanced and one report fit for purpose for all? A few Members felt that there was far too much jargon and the report needed to have fewer jargons in plain English wherever possible, e.g. what was E11/HA1 and was it the best way to explain?

Others felt that effective housing scrutiny might need more information to examine and keep track of performance/service delivery. Just by way of example, page 120 needed the cost, details and further commentary, and page 101 was mixed up. It was requested that if a table dropped, please repeat the headings on the next page and needed to explain what a particular value in tables was. It was added that a better, simpler and jargon-free set of keys/legends would be helpful and there was a need for long-term and short-term information.

A Member felt that it would be useful to know more about what was being done to address any highlighted issues/concerns instead of just raising these in the report. Others were of the view that if a report created too many questions then perhaps it was not such a good change and the Committee was only interested in housing element to focus their minds instead of an overcomplicated report with legends/keys paragraph repeated. On the other hand, a Member felt it useful to have a comparison with other service areas and added that as he was unburdened in relation to the past format and history, therefore, overall, the new report was fine except for the need for some clarity, relevant information and details that could be added in.

It was mentioned that former KPIs were still available in a perhaps slightly different format. A member noted that he was neither overjoyed, nor would completely dismiss the new format as a badly updated format. He felt that it might be that some time was needed to evaluate, and perhaps it was a question of adding more

explanation and simpler information with details therefore he was prepared to give it a benefit of the doubt.

In relation to the new report had been presented to all other O&S Committees and was perhaps rather passively received – it was commented that, quite possibly, other O&S Committees were not as inquisitive as the Housing O&S or maybe it was due to the continuity of the Housing Committee over the years?

The Chief Executive responded to comments and observations. He stated that target audiences were important - Managers needed to take relevant action, Scrutiny was to oversee, and the report was not intended for the full council meetings. He said that, previously, the performance report was rather narrowly focussed.

The Chief Executive noted the points about formatting, colour, content and details and stated that the commentary was there but could perhaps be further improved by the relevant Service Managers. He informed that the report could be refined further with more details and information, if the Committee wished but added that he would not wish to create too many separate reports but the Housing O&S could have only their housing section of the wider performance report. It was contended that there were some positive comments/comments in regard to the new corporate performance report at other O&S meetings, and the passiveness was perhaps a tongue in cheek reference. He added that housing was a substantial part of the council and it was good to have a healthy debate. He concluded that he was not perturbed about any criticism or questions about the new format and welcomed debate and appreciated the feedback to make the new corporate performance report fit for purpose.

After the detailed discussion, it was noted that:

- The Committee was pleased to see that housing was the only service area not to have any red sections;
- The Committee would provide offline comments to the Chief Executive; and
- The Coordinating Board would consider the new format of the corporate performance report with a view to arriving at a final joint response and/or to providing further feedback.

32. GOVERNMENT'S GREEN PAPER "A NEW DEAL FOR SOCIAL HOUSING"
(Agenda item 13.)

The Committee considered the report as well as the PowerPoint presentation about the Government's green paper "A New Deal for Social Housing" which included the five principles to improve social housing. Tenants' Panel representatives, along with other committee members, welcomed the Green Paper in principle.

It was noted that in order to underpin a new, fairer deal for social housing residents, the Government paper identified five principles outlined below:

- Ensuring homes are safe and decent;

- Effective resolution of complaints;
- Empowering residents and strengthening the Regulator;
- Tackling stigma and celebrating thriving communities; and
- Expanding supply and supporting home ownership.

The Committee agreed that this was a good opportunity to feedback on the consultation themes and questions to inform future social housing legislation, regulation and standards.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that:

- A draft consultation response be circulated for their email feedback; and
- A working group be set up about 'stigma' of social housing in Waverley.

33. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 14.)

The Committee noted the Work Programme and the made following observations:

- Affordable Housing item needed to include what was affordable, how many social housing units were there with a detailed background by wards and other details;
- Revised Rent Policy needed to come back with the changes;
- Revised Corporate Performance Report to come back in November;
- A new working group about social housing stigma now agreed; and
- An item about the renewal of contracts be added to the Work Programme.

34. ANY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN EXEMPT SESSION (Agenda item 16.)

There were none.

35. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 15.)

Not applicable.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.10 pm