

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR MONEY &  
CUSTOMER SERVICE - 16 SEPTEMBER 2019

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

**Present**

Cllr Joan Heagin (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr Roger Blishen  
Cllr Jerome Davidson  
Cllr George Hesse  
Cllr Jerry Hyman

Cllr Peter Martin  
Cllr Stephen Mulliner  
Cllr Peter Nicholson  
Cllr Julia Potts

**Also Present**

Councillor David Beaman

13. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 1.)

Cllr Peter Martin was confirmed as Chairman of the Value for Money and Customer Service O&S Committee for the remainder of the 2019/20 Council year.

14. MINUTES (Agenda item 2.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

In relation to the discussion at the last meeting regarding income from the Brightwells development Kelvin Mills, Head of Commercial Services, circulated a spreadsheet setting out the current financial position. There was a slight drop from initial estimates but no further variations were expected.

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 3.)

There were no apologies for absence.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 4.)

There were no declarations of interests in connection with items on the agenda.

17. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 5.)

There were none.

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 6.)

There were none.

19. DRAFT COMMERCIAL STRATEGY (Agenda item 7.)

Kelvin Mills, Head of Commercial Services, presented the draft Commercial Strategy to the Committee. He explained that this Strategy was designed to sit

alongside the council's Medium Term Financial Plan and Business Transformation Strategy. It identified a number of areas with the potential to generate a greater income for the council, including Careline, Waverley Training Services and Building Control. Cllr Mulliner, Chairman of the Budget Strategy Working Group, states that the Group had looked into these areas and agreed that they did have potential, although some were more limited than others.

The Committee noted that there was a substantial financial gap to fill, which would increase year on year up to £3.9m. In view of this, the Committee asked to have regular updates on the progress of the work being carried out as part of the Commercial Strategy. It also requested that timescales with clear milestones be added for each project set out within the strategy.

Cllr Hesse also highlighted that a strategic review of parking was under way which could also lead to a greater income for the council through more innovative charging methods. The Committee therefore asked that the outcomes of this review be added to its work programme for consideration in due course.

Cllr Martin highlighted that a new Corporate Strategy would be received by Council later in the week and, given the importance of this emerging Commercial Strategy, he felt that the council's commercial aspirations should be more explicitly referred to in the new Corporate Strategy.

The Committee agreed that the draft strategy was a good starting point, which could be improved by drawing out the key projects most likely to bring the largest income, as well as looking at more creative angles to expand the existing customer base. The Committee therefore agreed to request that a more developed draft of the strategy be brought to its next meeting in November.

20. INCOME GENERATION PROJECTS UPDATE (Agenda item 8.)

Having reviewed the draft Commercial Strategy, the Committee agreed that an update on income generation items should be included as a standing item on the Committee's agendas for future meetings. Careline, Building Control and Waverley Training Services had been identified as areas with particular potential to generate increased income and the Committee looked forward to hearing more about progress in these areas.

21. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 2019-2020 (APRIL-JUNE 2019)  
(Agenda item 9.)

The Chairman invited each Head of Service to summarise the Quarter 1 performance for their service area.

Business Transformation

David Allum, Head of Business Transformation, advised that the main focus for this service area over the last quarter had been developing the business transformation programme, including the customer service project. With regard to the two outstanding service plan actions, he explained that he was still awaiting the outcome of the 'One Public Estate' funding bid in relation to the review of the council

office accommodation; and work was progressing more slowly than anticipated on the IT systems for Building Control and Planning.

In response to further questions from the Committee, David advised that the Planning IT system that this action related to was a new back-office system, not the documents portal on the website. He was, however, aware of some issues with this system too and advised Members that the IT team was working with the supplier to address these problems. The Committee therefore requested an update on when these would be resolved. Members agreed that the IT issues in Planning needed to be prioritised, and the Chairman agreed to liaise with the Chairman of the Environment O&S Committee via the O&S Coordinating Board, to ask for more details about the time and cost implications for the delay in implementing the new back-office system.

### Finance and Property

Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property, summarised the highlights for the first quarter of 2019/20. The final accounts had been approved and published, achieving the 31 July deadline despite a last minute change to the external audit team. The majority of KPIs and service plan actions were green; Peter advised that action F7.1, relating to the Agresso financial IT system, had been transferred to the Business Transformation Programme. The finance summary was showing an adverse projection due to a void property in the council's investment portfolio.

### Policy and Governance

Robin Taylor, Head of Policy and Governance, explained that the focus of Quarter 1 had been on the Borough, Town and Parish elections, as well as preparation for the European elections. The induction programme for new councillors had also been successfully delivered. The implementation of the HR Strategy continued well, with the digitisation of HR paperwork. The KPIs showed an increase in sickness absence across the whole organisation but Robin assured the Committee that steps were being taken to address this.

Members were very concerned by the trend in long term sickness and the Committee agreed that this should be highlighted to the Executive. It was noted there had been an increase in mental health related issues, and Robin advised that the council was currently delivering a number of health and wellbeing initiatives to help address this.

Cllr Davidson highlighted that absences could sometimes be linked to low morale. The Committee noted that a staff survey had recently been undertaken and suggested that this might provide some insight into reasons for absence. Robin advised that the results of the survey had been generally positive, but had highlighted some areas to work on. He agreed to bring a report to the next meeting, summarising the results of the staff survey and drawing out any links to staff morale and sickness absence.

## 22. CUSTOMER SERVICES PROJECT UPDATE (Agenda item 10.)

David Allum presented the report which provided the Committee with an update on the Customer Services Project. He explained that the aim was to deliver £300k in

cashable savings by reducing the amount of direct customer contact through more self-service and by reviewing processes to eliminate 'waste'.

The first step of the project had been to get better information about the most common areas of customer demand. Over a three-week period, staff had logged all of their enquiries from customers in order to identify the top 35 customer requests. The project team was now mapping out these 'customer journeys' in more detail to see how they could be better delivered e.g. through automation or via a single customer service centre.

A master data management (MDM) system had been procured to link together back-office systems and a customer relationship management (CRM) was also being investigated. The aim was to bring together the dispersed customer service teams from across the organisation.

The Committee was concerned about the reliability of the data collected by staff over the three-week period as the amount of information collected had decreased in the second and third weeks. Members were also concerned that the sporadic data could be indicative of poor buy-in from staff, which would be essential for the project as a whole. David responded that it was important to maximise staff buy-in, and this had been the core theme of a recent all staff briefing from the Chief Executive.

Cllr Heagin noted that council tax billing was the top item on the list, and queried whether this was due to the time of year the exercise had been carried out. David responded that this had potentially affected the results, but much of the council's work was cyclical, so there would never be a perfect time to do it. Similarly, Cllr Hyman felt that important decisions shouldn't be taken using data from only one month, as areas such as grass cutting, which was a very popular topic in the summer, had not made the list at all.

The Committee therefore asked that David review the validity of the data that had been collected, and assess the implications of the timing of the data collection exercise and of the decreasing staff buy-in to determine whether this affected the reliability of the data. The Committee agreed that this summary should be circulated by email, but that if there were any concerns arising from the information, that these should be brought back to the Committee at a formal meeting.

23. BUDGET STRATEGY WORKING GROUP UPDATE (Agenda item 11.)

Cllr Mulliner, Chairman of the Budget Strategy Working Group, advised the Committee that the work stream 3 meetings with Heads of Service had now commenced. These provided an opportunity for the Group to ask detailed questions about how their services were delivered and to explore any potential options for increased income. Cllr Mulliner advised that the Group would provide a written report to the Committee's next meeting.

24. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 12.)

The Committee reviewed its work programme which set out items due to be considered at future meetings. Members also reminded themselves of the items discussed earlier in the meeting where a request had been made for a further update.

It was agreed that the items for the November meeting would include:

- Standing items (Corporate Performance Report and Quarterly Property Acquisition Report)
- Budget Strategy Working Group update
- Updated Commercial Strategy
- Complaints annual reports
- Property Investment Strategy update – it was suggested that the Portfolio Holder be invited to attend for this item and for an update on Brightwells Yard
- Staff Survey results and links to staff absence

It was agreed that whilst the Economic Development Action plan and cost implications of planning appeals were important items for Scrutiny they may need to be deferred due to November's very heavy agenda. The Committee agreed that the Chairman would decide offline when these items should come to the Committee.

25. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 13.)

At 8.35pm, it was RESOLVED that pursuant to Procedure Rule 20 and in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information (as defined by Section 100I of the Act) of the description specified in paragraph 3 of the revised Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

26. PROPERTY INVESTMENT STRATEGY ACQUISITIONS QUARTERLY UPDATE  
(Agenda item 14.)

The Committee received an update on the latest position with properties purchased under the Property Investment Strategy. No new investments had been made recently; an opportunity had been investigated but had not fulfilled the investment criteria so had not been pursued.

Members requested that an additional section be added to the report to set out when the rental period for each property would end or be due for review.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 8.43 pm**

**Chairman**