

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 25 JUNE  
2019

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

**Present**

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)	Cllr Patricia Ellis
Cllr Peter Marriott (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Michaela Gray
Cllr Christine Baker	Cllr Anna James
Cllr Richard Cole	Cllr Jack Lee

**Co-opted Members**

Terry Daubney	Dennis Smith
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**Apologies**

Cllr Michael Goodridge

**Also Present**

Annie Righton	Andrew Smith
Hugh Wagstaff	Nora Copping

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 1.)

The Committee confirmed the appointment of Cllr Richard Seaborne as the Chairman of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Council Year 2019/20.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 2.)

The Committee confirmed the appointment of Cllr Peter Marriott as the Vice-Chairman of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the Council Year 2019/20.

3. APPOINTMENT OF CO-OPTED MEMBERS (Agenda item 3.)

The Committee agreed the co-option of Terry Daubney and Dennis Smith, members of Waverley's Tenants Panel, and a substitute Gilliam Martin, to the membership of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

4. MINUTES (Agenda item 4.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 5.)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Michael Goodridge. No substitute was appointed.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 6.)

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

7. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 7.)

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

8. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 8.)

There were no questions submitted by members.

9. COMMITTEE MEMBERS INTRODUCTIONS (Agenda item 9.)

Members introduced themselves and highlighted any relevant background appropriate to the committee.

10. SERVICE PRESENTATION (Agenda item 10.)

The Committee received presentations from the Heads of Service on the areas falling within the remit of the Committee.

Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery and Communities, gave an overview of the range of services provided by his team. These were housing needs, housing development, housing strategy and enabling, private sector housing, service improvement and communities (specifically community safety). He advised that his team maintains the housing register and allocates social and affordable homes in the Borough. The Committee was advised that there is a lack of affordable homes in the Borough. The average price of a market home in the Borough was in the region of £500K, which is beyond the means of families on average salaries in the Borough. Work around the prevention of homelessness was an important part of the team's remit.

The Committee asked:

- how the Council monitors the levels of affordable housing expected from developers. Andrew advised that the team is involved at the start of the planning application through the enabling officers who advise on the required levels.
- does the Council still receive government grants? Andrew responded that there were grants still available and the Council does have a grant to fund social housing.

Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, advised that his team look after the maintenance of the properties, rents, tenancies, senior living and tenancy support services. An overview was presented of the work carried out to maximise net income under the HRA Business Plan.

The Committee received an update on the activities carried out by team in relation to the Council's contractors and optimisation of the services provided by them – It was suggested this could be an area the Committee may want to look at.

Hugh then reported on the challenges faced in collection of the rents to our properties. Currently there is a £28 million rent roll which has decreased slightly as government legislation imposed a 1% rent decrease. Despite this the arrear levels are relatively small at £180,000 which equated to a 0.6% of the rent roll. It was pointed out that the implementation of universal credit is likely to cause challenges with regards to rent arrears.

A new contractor (MPS) has recently been engaged to provide the maintenance for the Council's properties. A customer satisfaction survey is carried out throughout the maintenance journey.

It was stressed that the tenancy support team is central to the team as the team members are the ones who work to keep tenants in their homes.

Hugh then went on to outline the Housing Service Plan 2019/20 and its 5 objectives:

- Financially Robust;
- Meet residents needs;
- Professional people;
- Effective parties; and
- Customer experience.

Yasmine Makin, Scrutiny Officer, outlined the highlights from previous years of scrutiny work carried out by previous committees:

- Void re-let times have reduced from 57 in 2014/15 to 15 in 2018/19;
- Work around contract renewals (resulting in MPS contract);
- Work of the scrutiny group;
- Pride & Prejudice – improving the perception of social housing; and
- Housing design standards.

Issues/questions raised by the Committee:

- Is it true that housing associations provide 25% of affordable homes in the borough? Andrew advised this was incorrect and it was more like 75%.
- How many offers do people get before they are taken off the housing list? Hugh advised that the council now offer choice-based lettings which means people on the housing list bid for properties so they are offered something they have shown an interest in.
- It was requested that the Committee considers reviewing the allocations policy. Andrew agreed this would be useful.
- How long is a property empty before it is advertised? Hugh advised that if we are notified in advance that a property is coming void we will advertise immediately but it does depend upon any works required before re-let. The chairman advised there would be an informal training in September to look at selected issues.

- Is the work the contractors provide inspected? Hugh advised that post inspections do take place to ensure work is carried out to an appropriate standard.
- Do we keep statistics on homelessness? Andrew advised that these were available. Levels were low as robust prevention work is carried out by the team to avoid this.
- If people are put into private rent do they then drop off the housing list? Andrew advised this was not the case and they could still bid.
- It was asked what the policy around domestic violence was with regards to housing and whether there was a refuge in Waverley. Advice was there is no refuge and that we work closely with the police as to the best area to move someone to if they suffer DV.

**Resolved:**

The Chairman thanked the Heads of Service for their presentations.

11. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2018/19 QUARTER 4 AND END OF YEAR OUT TURN (Agenda item 11.)

Nora Copping, Policy and Performance Officer, presented the Q4 2018/19 Corporate Performance Report. For the benefit of new councillors she explained why the report was necessary. Members were advised that they only need be concerned with the sections relating to Housing Operations and Housing Strategy & Delivery. (sections 8 and 9 respectively).

1. The Committee was advised that the areas to note in section 8 for Q4 were KPI's H5, H7 and H8.

H5 was pointed out as the figures could be misleading for each quarter as they were accumulative.

Performance values for KPIs H7/8 had dropped due to the demobilisation of the current contractor and mobilisation of the new one but they were only just out of target and had been generally positive throughout the year.

The response rates for level 1 complaints was slightly off target but this was due to more complex investigations being required. The complainants were always kept advised of the delay.

Concern was raised regarding the report of a legionella case in a senior living scheme. It was highlighted that this was discovered during a water check and no individuals had actually caught legionella.

2. The Committee was advised that the KPIs in section 9 were primarily data only statistics as no targets are set as a great many of the results depend upon issues out of our control such as planning permission, contractor start dates etc.

It was requested that an additional metric to show the numbers of applications given detailed planning consent would be useful as there can be a long delay between initial application for permission and the actual start of building.

**Resolved:**

The Committee noted the performance of the service areas under its remit as set out in the report.

12. BUDGET STRATEGY WORKING GROUP (Agenda item 12.)

Resolved:

The Committee noted the report and nominated Cllr Peter Marriott to join the Budget Strategy Working Group.

13. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 13.)

Yasmine Makin, Policy Officer – Scrutiny, outlined the current Housing O&S work programme and items carried over from the previous year. The Committee then considered the items and agreed they were all important items that should remain on the programme.

Issues that were highlighted as of interest were:

Item 12 – A briefing on the role of housing associations.

Item 2&14 – Allocations policy and numbers in private rental.

Item 14 – More regular update on number of affordable homes completed by housing associations in Waverley.

Item 4 – Presentation on Housing and Mental Health. It was clear that this issue was of huge concern to some committee members, so the Committee would like an update on the provisions available for vulnerable people.

Item 12 – Would like to add this item as there are some areas that need attention.

The Chairman commented that there was a lot of linkage on many of these items.

It was requested the Committee have a short briefing on the bidding system for Council-owned properties. The Chairman advised this would be covered in the informal training on 10<sup>th</sup> September and invitations would be sent out soon.

Annie Righton, Strategic Director, asked the Committee to be clear on the outcomes they want by scrutinising these items.

Andrew Smith was asked to pull together a piece of work to shape the Committee's focus on the items that had been highlighted.

Yasmine Makin brought item 15 to the Committee's attention and advised that the VfM O&S Committee had this item on its work programme but had felt it would be more valuable to scrutinise this after the contracts had embedded a while.

The Chairman suggested a working group be considered to carry out a review of the Housing Allocations Policy. Andrew Smith advised that as part of the Business Transformation project relevant officers would be tied up in the near term looking at Housing Options, so he asked that the working group not be established until November at the earliest.

The Chairman also highlighted that it had been suggested that some site visits could be carried out to some new Waverley developments in order to give committee members an opportunity to see the standard of property that the Council is building.

Additional issues/questions raised by the Committee were:

- How many Housing Association properties do we have in the Borough?
- Can we look at developments that need attention as well as success stories.

**Resolved:**

The Chairman asked the Scrutiny Officer to arrange the list into a draft work programme for agreement at the next meeting.

14. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 14.)
15. ANY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN EXEMPT SESSION (Agenda item 15.)

There were no issues to be considered in Exempt Session.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.13 pm**

**Chairman**