

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 16 MARCH
2020

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

Present

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)
Cllr Christine Baker
Cllr Jerry Hyman (Substitute)

Cllr Richard Cole
Cllr Patricia Ellis

Terry Daubney (Tenant's Panel)

Dennis Smith (Tenants' Panel)

Apologies

Cllr Peter Marriott, Cllr Michael Goodridge, Cllr Michaela Gray,
Cllr Anna James and Cllr Jacquie Keen

54. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 14 January 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Peter Marriott, Michael Goodridge, Michaela Gray, Anna James and Jacquie Keen.

Cllr Jerry Hyman attended as a substitute.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had asked Cllr Richard Cole to stand-in as Vice-Chairman in the absence of Cllr Marriott.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

Cllr Seaborne declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 11, as he had previously been a member of the O&S sub-committee that had reviewed the Housing Repairs and Maintenance contracts procurement options in 2017. Cllr Cole would chair the discussion on Item 11.

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

There were no questions from members of the public.

58. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions from Members.

59. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 (Agenda item 6.)

Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, and Annalisa Howson, Service Improvement Manager presented the Quarter 3 Performance Management report

for Housing Operations and Housing Delivery and drew attention to highlights including:

- re-letting three homes to new tenants after the properties had been re-possessed following tenancy fraud investigations;
- the celebration of 100 years of council housing with an event involving the Chartered Institute of Housing;
- another successful Homes Exchange event; and,
- Information for tenants on the changes to the responsive repairs contractor.

In response to questions about tenancy fraud, Officers explained that proving tenancy fraud and re-gaining possession of a home was a lengthy process. It was not as big a problem in Waverley as nationally, but the shortage of affordable homes for rent meant that it was important to take action in all cases. In the case of the three recent re-possession, the registered tenants were not living in their property as their primary residence, which was contrary to their Tenancy Agreement.

Typically, there were 10 – 15 investigations underway at any time and the outcomes of successful investigations were publicised to tenants to show that this was taken seriously by the council. A summary of investigation outcomes was reported to the Audit Committee each quarter. It was acknowledged that the length of time it took to investigate and take proceedings against a tenant could have impacts on their mental health, but the Equalities Act was taken into account when officers considered the approach to be taken in each case.

The Committee noted the proposal to introduce a new Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the percentage of scheduled tenancy audit appointments carried out per quarter. Officers explained that the Council, as landlord, aimed to maintain contact with its tenants and carry out regular home visits: new tenants would be visited in the first 3 months to check that there were no problems, and to signpost to other services where necessary; the aim was to visit tenants on flexible tenancies annually, and visits would be prioritised to those who had not been in touch with the Council for any other reasons, for example for responsive repairs. The Tenant Management Team had been restructured to enable them to carry out these visits, and feedback from tenants was that they were keen to have the face to face contact with the Council.

The Committee noted that the response to Level 1 complaints to the Housing Operations service continued to be well below the target of 95% of complaints being responded to within 10 working days, and the target hadn't been achieved in two years. The Committee discussed whether lowering the target to 80% would make it more realistic, and allow time for complex complaints to be investigated thoroughly, whilst acknowledging that even this level had not been achieved in the last three quarters. The Committee was reluctant to revise the target for complaints without looking at this in more depth, and asked for a more detailed report on complaints to come to the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee RESOLVED to endorse the proposed new KPI for completion of tenancy audit visits, and asked for a detailed report on complaints to come to the next meeting of the committee.

60. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE (Agenda item 7.)

Louisa Blundell, Housing Development Manager, gave an update on the Council's current development activity to provide new affordable housing, referring to the report circulated in the agenda pack.

Highlights of recent work were the imminent delivery of the first phase of Site A (37 homes in total), due in mid-April, the appointment of a demolition contractor for Sites B and C by the end of March, and the appointment of a build contractor for Site B which was expected by early-May. Planning applications for schemes in Hartsgrove and Pathfields (both in Chiddingfold) had been approved. Planning applications for Queens Mead and Turners Mead (also in Chiddingfold) would be considered by the planning committee in July 2020. One contractor would be appointed for all four schemes.

Officers had worked closely with tenants allocated a new home on Ockford Ridge Site A to meet their needs and requests in terms of proximity to friends and former neighbours.

Councillors on the Committee noted that they had visited the homes at Amlets Lane on handover, and had been very impressed with the quality of the homes. The homes for rent had been allocated, two of the shared ownership homes had been sold and there were three applicants for the third shared ownership home.

With regard to Ockford Ridge Site C, the focus of the review of the specification in the light of the climate change emergency declaration was on energy efficiency of the homes. The review would not impact on the procurement timetable.

The Committee thanked Officers for the update, which was noted.

61. HOUSING ELEMENTS OF DRAFT CLIMATE EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (Agenda item 8.)

The Committee received an update from Hugh Wagstaff on the elements of the draft Climate Emergency Action Plan that related to the Housing Service. Waverley's housing stock accounted for almost 75% of Waverley's CO₂ emissions in 2016 and so addressing this sector was crucial to reducing the overall carbon footprint of the Council.

The focus of work to reduce the carbon footprint of the Council's social housing stock was in relation to improving energy efficiency through reduced energy leakage and more efficient heating which would have a big impact on the carbon footprint of the housing stock. The target was for an EPC band C rating across a minimum of 80% of the housing stock. As well as reducing CO₂ emissions, tenants would benefit directly from lower energy costs for heating and lighting.

The Committee discussed the importance of considering the carbon footprint of housing in its widest sense, taking account of location and the need for tenants to travel to work, school, and shops. The Housing Allocation Policy could play a part in this, by encouraging tenants to take up housing offers that would reduce their need to travel. It was noted that much of the borough was not well served by public transport, and there would need to be partnership working with Surrey County Council to address the provision of alternatives to private car use. The Committee

noted that the Design Council's *Building for Life 12* criteria for sustainable housing developments could be considered as part of the review of Waverley's Housing Design Standards as an objective assessment of the sustainability of new affordable housing developments.

The Committee thanked Officers for the work to do on developing the Climate Change action plan for Housing and noted that more work was needed to develop actions including costs, impacts and timeframes. The Committee asked that progress reports be brought to future meetings as the action plan was developed.

62. ALLOCATION SCHEME UPDATE (Agenda item 9.)

Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery and Communities, and Michael Rivers, Housing Needs Manager, introduced the report circulated in the agenda which provided an update on Waverley's Housing Allocation Scheme.

The Scheme had been comprehensively reviewed following the Localism Act 2011, and the current Scheme was substantially that which had been adopted in 2013 plus some subsequent minor amendments. The Scheme applied to all of Waverley's housing stock, plus 75% of Housing Association properties in the borough.

Committee Members agreed that whilst the Allocation Scheme served its purpose, it was very long and repeated itself in a number of places. The Committee's Pride or Prejudice Review had shown that there was widespread misunderstanding about the eligibility for council housing, and making the Allocation Scheme easier to understand would help to address this. There was also an opportunity to see how the Allocation Scheme could help support sustainability ambitions as well as providing homes for people in need.

The Committee RESOLVED that the review of the Housing Allocation Scheme would be better carried out in one or two dedicated committee workshops outside of the scheduled committee meetings, with findings being reported back to the Committee in due course.

63. MENTAL HEALTH AND HOUSING (Agenda item 10.)

Due the absence of the relevant manager, the Committee agreed to defer this item to their next meeting.

64. HOUSING MAINTENANCE - RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND VOIDS CONTRACT (Agenda item 11.)

Cllr Richard Cole Chaired the meeting for this item.

Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, introduced the report on the future delivery of the Responsive Repairs, Void Refurbishment and Disabled Adaptations contract.

He reported that the interim contract with Ian Williams Ltd had now gone live and the key IT interface between the company and the council was working well. The recommended approach to securing delivery of the service in the long-term was to commence a standard OJEU procurement, but in parallel with that process explore what opportunities there were for some kind of shared service. Whilst it was not felt that there were any mistakes made in the previous procurement, the current circumstances did allow an opportunity to check what other options were available and whether these might provide better value for money than a contract procurement.

The Housing O&S Committee had previously made a valuable contribution to the contract procurement in 2016/17, and there was now an opportunity for Members to explore the options for future delivery.

The Committee RESOLVED to endorse the overall approach proposed of twin-tracking an OJEU procurement alongside exploring other options, and agreed to have a task and finish group do a spotlight review over two workshop sessions of alternative methods of service delivery.

65. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 12.)

Yasmine Makin, Scrutiny Officer, briefly reviewed the Committee's future work programme, including the three spotlight reviews agreed at the meeting:

- Responsive Repairs service delivery review – two workshops; officers to scope the work and recruit Members to take part.
- Housing Allocations Scheme review – two workshops; officers to scope the work and recruit Members to take part. To commence as soon as possible after the Responsive Repairs workshops.
- Housing Design Standards, with a focus on Energy Efficiency standards – an in-depth review including site visits to innovative social housing projects. Officers to scope and recruit Members to take part, including representatives from the Tenants' Panel.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.07 pm

Chairman