

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR MONEY &
CUSTOMER SERVICE - 21 SEPTEMBER 2020

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

Present

Cllr Peter Martin (Chairman)
Cllr Joan Heagin (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Roger Blishen
Cllr Jerome Davidson

Cllr Jerry Hyman
Cllr Peter Marriott
Cllr Peter Nicholson
Cllr Julia Potts

Apologies

Cllr Stephen Mulliner

Also Present

Councillor John Gray, Councillor Paul Follows and Councillor Mark Merryweather

15. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13th July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and signed, the minutes of the Call-in meeting held on 9th September 2020 would be brought to the next meeting of the committee to be agreed.

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

No apologies for absence were received. Cllr Stephen Mulliner was absent from the meeting.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

18. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4.)

There were none.

19. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were none.

20. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (Agenda item 6.)

Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property, gave a verbal update on the progress with the revised Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). The committee were advised that a more comprehensive report would be brought to the November meeting.

Key Highlights:

In February the MTFP was approved. At the time the interest rate was 2% which highlighted a deficit of £5.4m to be found. Increases in council tax, property income and the tax base, along with other savings, were proposed to cover this deficit.

Due to Covid-19 issues this effected the council tax collection, along with the tax base. It has also increased the amount of universal credit claimants.

The MTFP has therefore been updated in line with the revised budget review. Waverley are holding up reference our income thanks to a number of actions including a freeze in recruitment. The committee were warned that the impact of interest rates in 2021/22 could have a significant effect.

Challenges going forward:

- PWLB – a consultation has gone out.
- Wey Court East is still a challenge.
- Working with the IAB and Executive to revise the property investment strategy.

Graeme Clark, Strategic Director, advised the team were committed to bringing the updated MTFP to O&S in November and Council in December. It was possible further workshops and briefings could be held if necessary.

Comments from Committee:

- Could we build changes to the business rate appeals into the MTFP?
 - Yes an analysis could be put in.
- What is the impact been on the transformation project? Have things changed?
 - There is no evidence we will not achieve our transformation goals.
- What will the likely overspend be at the end of the year?
 - We believe we have covered the gap this year with grants.
- What is the likely gap going to be in 2021/22?
 - Unable to predict at present depends on movements going forward.
- How is the recovery in car park income going?
 - Income is recovering but with further measures being put in place and a possible 2nd wave this may slump again.
- Are there any further government grants in the pipeline?
 - Income related grants are currently being looked at and will be applied for.
- With the new rule of 6 enforcement is this likely to have a negative cost impact?
 - Not aware of any cost implications to this at present. It does not change what we do, just the number of people it applies to. There is a slight cost for the track and trace QR codes which are being put up.

The Committee welcomed the update and thanked the officers for their comments.

21. DRAFT CORPORATE STRATEGY (Agenda item 7.)

Robin Taylor, Head of Policy and Governance, introduced the Draft Corporate Strategy and outlined the governance journey that had been taken. He advised that the strategy was being taken to all four O&S committees and asked the committee to make comment which would be fed back in order to refine the strategy.

Comments:

- Report more comprehensive than first draft.
- Point 23 needs to be more flexible as it is unlikely to be possible we can go totally paperless due to certain exemptions for health and accessibility issues.
- Feel points should be split into portfolios so O&S can scrutinise effectively. Objectives need to be smart and measurable.
- Point 11 needs targets.

The committee noted the draft strategy and asked that their comments be fed into the revision of the strategy for the Executive.

22. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 (Agenda item 8.)

Robin Taylor, head of Policy and Governance, introduced the Q1 Corporate Performance Report. He advised that the committee should be mindful that these figures had been impacted by Covid-19.

Business Transformation

- It was noted that pre Covid the amount of staff working from home had been 10% and was now at a level around 90%.
 - The committee asked what the likely level was going to be when things calm down. A staff survey had indicated that staff were keen on a work/home balance.
 - An IT strategy was being developed to provide help to staff long term to effectively work from home if feasible and to come into office just for meetings etc
 - Officers were asked if there was evidence of whether working from home was productive? Annie Righton, Strategic Director, advised there had been no reduction in delivery and in fact staff had been carrying out extra duties as well as their day to day ones.
- A Office 365 upgrade was moving forward and was planned to be implemented in March 2021.
- The team were currently finalising recommendations around staff travel and allowances.
- A new bespoke system (Horizon) was being rolled out for building control and planning services.

Finance

- The committee were surprised there had been little impact on council tax collection due to Covid. Peter Vickers highlighted that it had been expected but had not been as bad as first thought.

- F2 – Non domestic rates were highlighted red. Some businesses had asked to change profile.

Policy and Governance

- Covid had a significant impact on all the areas covered by this service.
- HR2 – Absence levels were once again of concern but it was highlighted that the data reflected the Covid situation and long term sick.

The committee asked it be recorded their thanks to all officers for their response to Covid -19 and maintaining services as they have.

The committee noted the report and ask that their comments be passed to the Executive.

23. RCT PROGRAMME UPDATE (Agenda item 9.)

Debbie Smith, Development Programme Manager, updated the committee on the RCT Programme. She advised that there were ten projects within the programme and each had been allocated to the relevant O&S committee for monitoring. The Value for Money O&S had seven projects in their remit.

The committee felt this latest report was much easier to read than the previous one.

Comments:

- It was noted that the maximum number of staff currently allowed into the Bury's was 120. Officers were asked if this reflected future office requirements? 120 is a self-imposed limit following assessment of the building. The future office requirement had not yet been fully established but for the time being this was the maximum to allow social distancing, and this was also broken down into services. Maximum number of staff that have been in office has been 60 thus far.
- Corporate Risk Register – are their new items added? Are their mitigations list against each risk? Yes each action has a mitigation against it. Patrick Tuite, Procurement Officer, was running the register.

The committee Noted the significance of the RCT Programme on the future of Waverley Borough Council and commend the officers on the work carried out so far.

24. PROPERTY INVESTMENT ADVISORY BOARD UPDATE (Agenda item 10.)

Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property, updated the committee on the current issues being considered by the Property Investment Advisory Board (PIAB). Much of the issues had already been covered in the discussion earlier in the meeting around the MTFP. Annexe 1 included with the agenda set out the updates.

The committee noted there was lots in the pipeline. It was agreed an update should be brought to each meeting as a standing item.

Concern was raised as to the risk to the council regarding outstanding planning applications relating to the Brightwells site. (Access to the multi storey and design of road layout etc.). The committee were advised this was a long term scheme and that there were conditions to be satisfied. Discussions were taking place on the wider infrastructure.

Cllr Merryweather highlighted that there was currently a vacancy on the PIAB and it was suggested Cllr Mulliner be approached to fill this if he was willing.

The committee noted the report and commended the officers comments.

25. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 11.)

The chairman outlined the items scheduled for inclusion in the next meeting on 16th November 2020.

- Corporate Performance Report Q2 2020/21
- RCT Update
- Corporate Strategy
- PIAB Update
- MTFP Update (including thoughts on reserves)

Future Items for consideration:

- It was noted that the Economic Development Strategy would be going to the Community Wellbeing O&S as part of the RCT project. The chairman would raise this at the O&S Co-Ordinating Board as it also came under this committees remit.
- CIL – Committee needs to consider this issue at some stage in regards to the structure and process for spending the money.
- Budget Strategy Working Group – the committee discussed whether this should be disbanded. It was felt due to the current financial climate it may be prudent to keep it in the background to assist the portfolio holder.

26. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 12.)

There were no items to discuss in exempt session.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.08 pm

Chairman