

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING  
- 28 SEPTEMBER 2020

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

**Present**

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)  
Cllr Peter Marriott (Vice Chairman)  
Cllr Christine Baker  
Cllr Richard Cole

Cllr Patricia Ellis  
Cllr David Else  
Cllr Michael Goodridge  
Cllr Jacquie Keen

Cllr Jerry Hyman (Substitute)

**Apologies**

Cllr Michaela Gray and Dennis Smith

**Also Present**

Councillor Paul Follows

11. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2020 were confirmed as a correct record subject to a small correction on the front page relating to attendees.

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Michaela Gray who was substituted by Councillor Jerry Hyman, and from Dennis Smith from the Tenants' Panel who was substituted by Gillian Martin.

13. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

No questions were received.

15. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

No questions were received.

16. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 (Agenda item 6.)

Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery and Communities, introduced the performance report covering Housing Delivery, Private Sector Housing, and Housing Options. There were more detailed reports on housing delivery and homelessness on the committee agenda. In response to questions the Committee noted:

- The principle of 'Fabric First' was to reduce the carbon footprint of a building through the fabric of the build, and then to look at what additional measures were needed eg PV panels, to achieve zero carbon.
- The Affordable Housing SPD had been seen by the Housing O&S committee during its development, and would come forward for approval later in the year.
- The target for providing a full response to complaints was ten days, although this was sometimes missed in the event of complex cases. The low number of complaints meant that one or two missing the target had a major impact on the RAG rating.
- Monitoring and testing for Legionella at Blunden Court had continued throughout lockdown, and a contractor had now been appointed to complete planned works to the piping to address the issue. The timing of these works was being carefully planned to minimise the disruption and inconvenience for residents.
- The number of public health funerals had reverted to more usual levels in Q2.
- Housing delivery and construction had not been impacted too significantly during the Covid lockdown, and work had continued throughout.

The Service Improvement Manager presented the performance report for Housing Operations and the Landlord Service for quarter 1. The Housing Customer Service Team had become the Community Helpline during the lockdown, making contact with tenants over the age of 60 as well as resident on the vulnerable and shielding lists. Feedback from tenants and residents had been very positive.

The Tenants Panel had adopted the use of Zoom in order to continue their work, and close working relationship with the Housing Operations Team. The Key Performance Indicators reflected the reality of the impact of the Covid 19 situation, for example not being able to access the homes of those who were shielding in order to carry out repairs. Three service plan actions had been completed during quarter 1.

**The Committee CONGRATULATED the Housing Teams on their hard work over the lockdown period supporting tenants.**

17. WAVERLEY HOUSING STRATEGY 2019-20 UPDATE (Agenda item 7.)

The Housing Strategy / Enabling Manager presented this agenda item.

- 150 new affordable homes had been completed in the last financial year. This was well above the Council's average of 82 new homes per annum since 2012.
- Examples were shown of some of the new affordable homes which had been developed.
- It was predicted that 135 new social homes would be completed during the financial year 2020-21.

There was a question around what the Council might do to constrain Housing Associations privatising parking enforcement on their estates, resulting in charges to residents for parking permits. Officers recognised that this could cause hardship

for Housing Association tenants, but this was not something over which the council had any power or influence.

There was a further question and an explanation around different methods of providing affordable housing on sites, including on Rural Exception Sites where market housing could be sold at discounted prices for people with a local connection, in order to make socially rented dwellings viable.

There was a question about how planned changes in the white paper *Planning for the Future* would affect delivery of affordable housing in the borough. Officers responded that the more immediate threat was from the proposed changes to the current planning system which would temporarily raise the small sites threshold below which developers did not have to contribute to affordable housing to 40 or 50 units, and introduce First Homes sold at a discount to market price for first time buyers. These proposals would lead to fewer socially rented homes being delivered, which were the homes which were needed the most. There was no detail about how discounts on First Homes would be funded. The difficulty of finding sites for social housing or affordable housing was also discussed as Waverley Borough did not have many large sites to contain affordable housing. A new Housing Strategy for Waverley was being developed which would attempt to address these issues.

Councillors wanted more in the report about why social housing was important, including something on the economic contribution of the people working in Waverley Borough in service roles as key workers who struggled to afford to live in the borough. If people did not have to drive into the Borough to work it would also drive down emissions.

The Chairman wanted the report to highlight that Housing Operations had been doing a really good job in driving down carbon emissions in Council housing stock, by increasing the number of properties with an EPC rating of C or better. This had been achieved through replacing windows and doors, boilers and insulation to reduce heat loss and improved energy efficiency.

There was a further question regarding the standards of affordable housing and whether providers had to adopt standards set by Waverley Borough. It was explained that new affordable homes had to meet nationally-set space standards and emissions standards. The Council also had its own standards for new builds.

**The Committee noted the contents of the report, and that a new Housing Strategy was being drafted to which the Committee would have the opportunity to contribute at an early stage.**

18. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE (Agenda item 8.)

The Housing Development Manager provided a verbal update on the housing development programme:

Ockford Ridge, Site A – 27 of the 37 new homes had been handed over and 25 tenants had moved in. The remaining ten homes would be handed over by the end of October.

Ockford Ridge, Site B – a demolition contractor had been appointed to undertake demolition on Site B and Site C. Thakeham Homes had been

identified as preferred contractor for Site B, to deliver 17 new homes. All tenants on Site B had now moved to Site A.

Ockford Ridge, Site C – Reserved matters planning application due to be submitted shortly. The majority of tenants had already moved out. Procurement of a build contractor would commence shortly, with the potential for the successful contractor to be appointed to Site F also.

Ockford Ridge, Sites E and F – preparatory works were progressing to bring these sites forward, with most tenants already having moved into new homes.

Aarons Hill – slight delay in completing the footpath diversion but tender prepared for a Design and Build contract.

Sites in Chiddingfold and Churt were at different stages of planning and contractor procurement. Waverley had acquired affordable homes from CALA Homes in Cranleigh and Langham Homes in Witley as part of the developers' planning obligations. There were further sites at very early planning stages that could deliver a further 100 new affordable homes.

In response to questions, Officers explained the principle of 'Fabric First' was to reduce the carbon footprint through the fabric of the build, and then to look at what additional measures were needed eg PV panels, to achieve zero carbon.

**The Committee noted the current housing development programme and commended the Housing Development Team for having continued their work on delivering new affordable homes for rent in Waverley throughout the Covid lockdown period.**

19. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE (Agenda item 9.)

The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities provided an update. He explained that it was a Government requirement to have a Homelessness Strategy and a Homelessness Prevention Action Plan. A new strategy would be developed, to tie in with the new Housing Strategy.

During lockdown everyone had to be accommodated under a Government Scheme "Everyone In" whether they were eligible or not. Some people had to be housed outside of the Borough, in Southampton, which was something the Council tried not to do if at all possible but the emphasis had had to be on finding accommodation. The Council had liaised with Southampton City Council throughout the process and worked with homeless charities in that area and aimed to move the people back to the Borough at the earliest opportunity.

The Committee noted that the capacity of the Homelessness Team was very stretched, but had worked tirelessly and with compassion and care to home clients. There had been few legal challenges, which was a testament to the thoroughness of the council's approach in responding to homelessness applications.

There was a question about what a "modular unit" was in the context of the report. It was a prefabricated building delivered to a site with wiring and plumbing already

installed and just needing connection to services. There had been an initial assessment of where these might be located within the main settlements.

There was a further question from Councillors regarding the number of rough sleepers in the Borough. Officers explained that the number was very low, and it was important to distinguish between rough sleepers and beggars. The Council worked closely with the York Road Project and part funded an outreach worker to identify rough sleepers and find out about their particular circumstances and whether they were genuinely homeless. All homeless people were invited to make a homelessness application to the Council. Problems arose when they did not wish to do so. There was a website, Streetlink, where rough sleepers could be reported and the Council would endeavour to make contact with them. There was also a count to see how many rough sleepers could be identified on a given night in November. If there are 3 nights or more where the temperature was predicted to be zero or below there was a duty to house people regardless of circumstances.

There were questions from Councillors regarding accommodation which various Councils had available outside of their own boroughs and why this was done when other Councils had spaces in Waverley Borough. There were also questions around the use of temporary accommodation. It was agreed that an explanation would be provided to Councillors by email.

**The Committee noted the contents of the report and resolved to escalate concerns about resource capacity to house more homeless people over the winter period were the Covid situation to deteriorate further.**

20. HOUSING (HRA) RECOVERY CHANGE & TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda item 10.)

The Service Improvement Manager updated the Committee on the Housing Team's Recovery, Change and Transformation Project:

- The team had continued to work with tenants to collect rent during the lockdown, and to work with those who were struggling to make their rent payments. There had been an increase in rent arrears, but Waverley's arrears remained below the national average and within the parameters of the business plan.
- The Council had not been able to let any homes in April 2020 so there had been a backlog in May. Homes had started being let again and a plan was in place to address the backlog by the end of the October. There would be a potential void rent loss of £400k in 2020/21.
- All but emergency repairs were halted during lockdown, and the repairs service only resumed in June with the contractor contacting tenants with outstanding repairs to make Covid-safe arrangements to complete works. Water hygiene and gas safety checks continued throughout lockdown, with access being obtained by court order if necessary.
- The capital works programme had been reviewed and works were being carried out where this was possible given the capacity of the contractor and the ability to meet safe working protocols.

**The Committee noted the report and the good work being achieved.**

21. REVISED WAVERLEY CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020-2025 (Agenda item 11.)

The Committee were invited to comment on the draft version of the Corporate Strategy.

**Councillors reported that they had already attended workshop sessions and made comments and had nothing further to add at this time.**

22. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 12.)

It was felt that the homelessness update was needed to stay on the work programme. The Chairman suggested that he and the Vice Chairman could continue to meet with officers approximately a month before the meeting to identify important work programme items to be discussed at each meeting. It was felt that the anti social behaviour policy was an important work programme area for the Head of Housing Delivery and Communities and the Service Improvement Manager and that it should be on the agenda for the next meeting in November.

The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities stated that anti social behaviour amongst the Council's tenants was extremely low although it was increasing in amount and in seriousness. The Committee recognised that a large proportion of anti social behaviour was from the private sector. The Committee felt there might be scope for joint working with the Community and Wellbeing O&S Committee.

It was agreed that an informal meeting would be held to agree on what information the committee wanted regarding mental health issues arising from Covid 19.

A scoping report for the Housing Design Standards Review was due to be considered at the November meeting.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.35 pm**

**Chairman**