

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 23
NOVEMBER 2020

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING - <DATE>

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

Present

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)	Cllr David Else
Cllr Peter Marriott (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Michael Goodridge
Cllr Christine Baker	Cllr Jacquie Keen
Cllr Richard Cole	Terry Daubney (Co-Optee)
Cllr Patricia Ellis	

Apologies

Dennis Smith (co-optee)

Also Present

Cllr Paul Follows, Cllr Jerry Hyman, Cllr Anne Marie Rosoman

23. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28th September 2020 were confirmed as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman once the Covid 19 crisis had abated.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Dennis Smith of the Waverley Tenants' Panel.

25. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

No questions were received.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

No questions were received.

28. HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY UPDATE (Agenda item 6.)

The Housing Needs Manager gave a verbal report and answered questions:

- At the start of the first lockdown local authorities had had a duty to get homeless people in to emergency accommodation. This initiative was known as Everyone In. This provision had lasted until July 2020. A positive outcome within Waverley was that some rough sleepers engaged with the council for the very first time and that meant the council was able to get some into longer term accommodation.
- Waverley Borough Council had been able to provide move on accommodation for roughly 22 people.
- The Government had launched the Next Steps Programme providing short term revenue funding. Waverley had received approximately £15,000 funds to help with emergency accommodation costs.
- Waverley had put in a capital bid for 6 modular units to accommodate people but had only received funding for 2.
- There was one household in temporary accommodation at present and 105 open cases of people under threat of homelessness. There were 70 approaches in October from people wanting new housing.
- The team of Housing Officers had experienced some staff sickness but as of 23rd November the team was back to full strength.

It was clarified that the precise number of rough sleepers in Waverley was still subject to official verification but the numbers were very low. Most of the people Waverley Borough tried to help were under threat of homelessness rather than actually homeless rough sleepers. Evictions from private rented accommodation were very low at present as courts were not allowed to enforce evictions during the Covid crisis.

The Housing Needs Manager said that the capital project to deliver modular units had to be up and running by the end of March 2021 in order to secure the funding. Modular units could be delivered very quickly which was why they were a good choice. The Chairman said that he wanted to see the Executive encourage Waverley Borough Council's Planning team to support these schemes so that they were not held up.

29. ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY (Agenda item 7.)

The Service Improvement Manager presented this agenda item. She explained that all social landlords had a duty to have published an Anti-Social Behaviour Policy and Procedure so tenants knew how they could be supported. The overarching message of the Policy was that everyone must treat each other with respect. The policy had been updated and reviewed to include new legislation and regulations. The Policy had been clear on the difference between anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood disputes.

It was made clear that the policy only covered tenants living in properties owned and managed by Waverley Borough Council. People in private property could be protected through the Council's Community Safety work and via referrals from the Police or Environmental Health.

Councillors felt the documents were very good and easily understood. Especially around what constituted anti social behaviour and the difference between anti social behaviour and neighbour disputes.

There was a discussion around the issue of noise transference. It was noted that insulation in some converted properties was poor. The Service Improvement Manager said the service were aware of properties where there was a lot of noise transference and the service encouraged people to be aware of the impact they were having on each other.

There was a further discussion around whether it was appropriate for Councillors to get involved in helping tenants such as supporting them at court hearings and it was suggested that issues should be passed to officers or the appropriate authorities. The Service Improvement Manager was going to seek advice on the issue from Democratic Services.

The Chairman wanted to see the figures to justify the statement that the council did not have a big anti social behaviour problem. The Service Improvement Manager said she would get the figures to include. It was felt the document needed to be clear that it referred only to Council stock and not the whole borough.

RESOLVED

To put near the front of the policy in the introduction something regarding the scope to which it applied.

To add a section on councillors' role – they should avoid getting drawn into disputes and should refer the issues to officers or external agencies.

30. TENANT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY (Agenda item 8.)

The Service Improvement Manager presented this agenda item. She explained that the strategy had been due for renewal. She emphasised how important it was for tenants to tell the service what was working well and what was important for tenants. Due to the Covid 19 crisis there had been different tenant engagement methods this year such as Zoom. The service had tried to make it easier for people to be involved. It was acknowledged that not all tenants had access to technology or felt comfortable with using it. It was also felt that the service needed to target engagement with young families and new tenants.

There were three main priorities for the strategy which were to increase the way people could get involved with the service, making it easier to get involved and making it clear that the officers would listen, consider and act on feedback. The

strategy contained an action plan as well to show how the service would work on the priorities.

The committee heard from Terry Daubney, a tenants panel representative on the Committee about how important tenant involvement was. He highlighted that there were regular meetings such as with a frontline housing officer but that only about 15 tenants were involved and the number of tenants involved needed to be raised. He felt all councillors and officers needed to actively promote the work of the Tenants Panel. The Service Improvement Manager suggested asking all councillors to try to engage with tenants in order to get feedback.

The Chairman commended the way in which the service had gone about trying to involve tenants. He suggested that the strategy ought to highlight that one way in which tenants could get involved was by being co-optees to the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

There was a question from councillors regarding how the success criteria for the strategy were measured. The Service Improvement Manager suggested having a target of getting another 5 tenants involved in the panel and making sure feedback was taken whenever officers engaged with tenants.

RESOLVED

Terry Daubney was going to liaise with Cllr Keen regarding Councillors engaging with tenants.

31. RCT PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda item 9.)

The Service Improvement Manager presented this agenda item. She explained that during the Covid 19 lockdown no legal action had been taken to recover rent from those in arrears. Rent collection levels had now improved from what they were in the middle of the first lockdown. As a result of the Covid crisis there was a backlog in letting properties and at the end of October 2020 there were 29 un-let properties compared with 70 earlier in 2020. For the same reason there was also a 5 week backlog on repairs. Only 2 properties were without a gas safety certificate at the end of October 2020 compared with 70 in the summer. By the end of December 2020 all properties should have a gas safety certificate provided tenants were comfortable with letting the gas safety engineers into their homes.

The Service Improvement Manager noted that the service would be unable to spend the total budget for capital programmes this year due to the Covid 19 situation. The underspend would be added to the HRA reserves.

It was noted that the largest loss to the service came from the lack of rent being collected when homes were empty. Rent loss was within the parameters of the Business Plan but not likely to be back to the pre-lockdown situation until Spring 2021.

There was a question around the incorporation of Housing into the new Corporate Customer Service Centre and whether it was going to make it harder for those who were uncomfortable with technology. The Service Improvement Manager advised

that as residents adapted to self-service that would free resources to support those not comfortable with technology.

32. SCOPE FOR DESIGN STANDARDS REVIEW (Agenda item 10.)

The Housing Development Manager presented this agenda item. She explained that the standards for new builds had last been reviewed in 2018, by a Housing O&S Task & Finish Group. The present scoping report had been drawn up in consultation with the committee's Chairman and Vice Chairman and the Council's corporate team.

Councillor Richard Cole and Tenants Panel Member Terry Daubney were added to the membership of the task and finish group to review and update the Housing Design Standards document.

RESOLVED

The scoping report for the Housing Design Standards Review was agreed.

33. CORPORATE STRATEGY (Agenda item 11.)

The Corporate Policy Manager introduced this agenda item. She reminded the group that the committee had looked at an early draft of the Corporate Strategy in September 2020. Councillor Baker wanted a line in the strategy changed from saying "Waverley Borough Council is an authority that promotes and sustains" to "Waverley Borough Council is an authority where the drive for environmental sustainability will be at the heart of all it does". Some of the other Councillors supported this although some felt it should not be expressed so strongly.

RESOLVED

- Councillor Baker would send her suggested wording to Councillor Paul Follows so that it could be agreed with the Executive.
- References to the Climate Emergency Action Plan should be changed to say Carbon Neutrality Action Plan.
- The wording would be changed to say Waverley sought to promote and sustain as the vision should be forward looking

34. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 12.)

This agenda item was introduced by the Corporate Policy Manager. It was noted that the Community and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had wanted to look into mental health in the Borough in greater detail. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee wanted to feed into the work of that committee.

The Housing White Paper had come out in the week preceding the committee meeting. The Chairman wanted an informal session about it in December 2020.

There was also a question around the Ewart Bequest. The Housing Development Manager agreed to bring an update to a future meeting of the committee as part of

her Housing Development Update. She would update the committee on progress with selling the site so that it could be developed. She clarified that the conditions of the bequest related to the bequest itself and not the land involved.

RESOLVED

- To have an input into the work of the Community and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding mental health in the Borough
- To set up an informal session on the Housing White Paper in December 2020

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.04 pm

Chairman