

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR MONEY &  
CUSTOMER SERVICE - 16 NOVEMBER 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 Stephen Mulliner  
Cllr Peter Nicholson  
Cllr Julia Potts

**Also Present**

Councillor John Gray, Councillor Paul Follows, Councillor Andy Macleod and Councillor Mark Merryweather

27. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 9<sup>th</sup> September and 21<sup>st</sup> September were confirmed as a correct record subject to a change in the numbering of the agenda items from the 21<sup>st</sup>. They would be signed by the Chairman after the Covid 19 situation had abated.

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

There were no apologies or substitutions.

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

There were none.

31. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were none.

32. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE (Agenda item 6.)

This agenda item was introduced by the Head of Finance and Property.

A contingency budget was approved by Full Council in August 2020 due to the ongoing impact of Covid-19 although it could not solve the funding problems caused by the pandemic.

Annexe 1 of the documents presented showed the budget that was approved in February 2020 prior to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic being felt. Annexe 2 showed the contingency budget.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets and Commercial Services showed a presentation on the financial pressures facing the Council. The presentation considered the external factors the Council had to deal with and the measures taken to address these.

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic the Council had experienced a decline in business rates and cost cutting had been necessary. There had also been a loss in revenue from leisure centres and car parks. The Council had drawn down on reserves in this financial year in order to meet the shortfall.

There was a slide which showed shortfall compared to the original budget. The Council would face a £2.8 million shortfall due to Covid in 2021/22. Income Volatility Provision due to Covid would start in 2021/22 and there would be £1 million to last the next four years.

There was an unresolved shortfall for the next four years as fees, charges and rental income was reduced. Leisure centres and car parks were still badly affected. In a normal year the leisure centres generated an income of £500,000. This year there would be no income. There was a lot of uncertainty surrounding help from the government although government grants had increased slightly.

There were a number of questions from Councillors around staffing costs. The Strategic Directors Annie Righton and Graeme Clark explained that there were two major Council Projects at present – the Business Transformation Project and the Recovery, Change and Transformation Project which included a look at where the workforce worked from. The Management Board were looking at how jobs needed to be done in future when they became vacant. Councillors recognised that staffing was the Council's biggest expense. It was stated that the staffing bill was £17m, £3.5 million of which was Housing Revenue Account costs. There had been a freeze on vacancies in April 2020 but demands on the organisation had actually increased due to the Covid crisis. Some redeployment had occurred. There was a further question from Councillors about possible reduction to salaries due to working from home. Annie Righton said there had not been discussions about that at this stage. There had been discussion about the possibility for reducing office space.

There was a further question around income from the Council's investment properties and it was confirmed that the Council were continuing to receive a regular income from those.

## **RESOLVED**

- The Committee noted the report, and reminded the Executive of the suggestions made in July in the context of the Contingency Revised General Fund Budget for 2020/21 relating to areas where further cost savings might be possible.

- To look at the Council's reserves and provisions in another meeting in greater depth prior to the budget setting. This would be arranged by the Committee's Vice Chairman.
- The Committee would like financial data to be presented differently in future meetings so that when figures are presented, they know how much it is out of. The Committee wanted to see gross figures presented on the left hand side of any tables of figures.

33. BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PROJECT (Agenda item 7.)

The Head of Business Transformation presented this agenda item. He talked about savings which had been generated. 10 projects were ongoing or yet to start. 2 projects were completed, namely the revenues and the housing options. The post, printing and scanning project was also virtually completed. Savings had been made through a new print contract and a hybrid mail contract.

The Customer Service Centre had gone live in October 2020. The Council had been writing their own customer service software. £170,000 savings had already been made out of a target of £300,000 by 2022/23. Some Councillors were concerned about potential problems with support for bespoke systems. The Head of Business Transformation responded that staff involved had received 2 weeks intensive training by the software supplier and a lot of councils were using similar software so Waverley hadn't had to start from scratch with writing software e.g. regarding missed bins.

There were currently 390 workstations in The Burys. There were plans to reduce these to 150 and let out the remaining space for short term lets.

Staff were being consulted regarding essential car user payments. Implementation of the changed arrangements was planned for May 2021 with an estimated £150,000 savings.

**RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the information received and wished to ask for clearer financial information particularly relating to information to be shown by year and for actual savings to be shown.

34. RECOVERY, CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (Agenda item 8.)

This agenda item was presented by the Development Programme Manager. She reported that several projects were likely to close in the coming weeks.

**RESOLVED**

The Committee noted the progress which had been made and requested more commentary on the cost cutting nature of the financial information presented to be given to them at the next committee meeting.

35. CORPORATE STRATEGY (Agenda item 9.)

The Head of Policy and Governance introduced this agenda item.

## **RESOLVED**

Councillors thought the presentation had greatly improved from their July 2020 meeting and gave the following feedback:

- The third page of the Strategy was felt to be repetitive and lengthy
- Where mention was made of the climate emergency, mention could be made about what the Council was doing regarding its own housing stock
- They wished the Strategy to be condensed with bullet points

### 36. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 10.)

It was noted that the Budget Strategy working group was no longer operational and that the Committee had looked at the Corporate Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy as set out in the work programme.

## **RESOLVED**

That there would be a short standing item in future regarding the boundary review including the officer time involved.

### 37. PROPERTY INVESTMENT ADVISORY BOARD UPDATE (Agenda item 11.)

Councillors received an update from the Head of Finance and Property detailing the performance of the property portfolio.

## **RESOLVED**

Councillors resolved to note the papers regarding the property portfolio.

### 38. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 12.)

At 8.53pm, it was RESOLVED that pursuant to Procedure Rule 20 and in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items on the grounds that it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information (as defined by Section 100I of the Act) of the description specified in the appropriate paragraph(s) of the revised Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

### 39. PROPERTY INVESTMENT QUARTERLY REPORT (Agenda item 12.a)

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.22 pm**

**Chairman**