

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 9 MARCH  
2021

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

**Present**

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)	Cllr Patricia Ellis
Cllr Peter Marriott (Vice Chairman)	Cllr David Else
Cllr Christine Baker	Cllr Michael Goodridge
Cllr Richard Cole	Cllr Jacquie Keen
Terry Daubney, Waverley Tenants' Panel	

**Apologies**

Cllr Michaela Wicks and Dennis Smith

**Also Present**

Gillian Martin, Waverley Tenants' Panel, Cllr John Robini, Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman

46. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 January 2021 were confirmed as a correct record. They would be signed by the Chairman after the Covid -19 crisis had abated.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Michaela Wicks.

48. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

There were no questions from members of the public.

50. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions from Members.

51. TENANTS PANEL UPDATE (Agenda item 6.)

The Chairman of the Tenants' Panel, Terry Daubney, reported to the Committee regarding this agenda item. He said that the group had learnt new ways to keep in touch and had been using Zoom for panel social meetings and engagement events. The Panel had raised issues with the housing management team and helped with neighbour disputes and antisocial behaviour. The Panel had its first Zoom AGM last year. The Panel had met with Waverley's Senior Living Team and had carried

out an evaluation of what they had done during the Covid -19 pandemic, looking at what had gone well and so on. The group wanted to return to face-to-face meetings when it could.

The group noted and welcomed The Charter for Social Housing Residents - Social Housing White Paper which communicated the clear standards of what tenants could expect from their landlord with a focus on hearing tenants' voices. The Tenants' Panel needed to provide tenants with the tools to be better able to influence Waverley Housing Polices. It was emphasised that everybody had a right to mutual respect.

Tenants' Panel Member Gillian Martin stated that Terry Daubney had been a very encouraging Chairman and encouraged other tenants to get more involved. Younger tenants were getting involved with the Panel, including those with young families.

Councillors congratulated the Chairman of the Tenants' Panel stating that there had been a great improvement in communication and that criticism from the Tenants' Panel was always constructive and they were helpful and positive. The Head of Housing Operations also thanked the Tenants' Panel for all that they did.

Tenants Panel Chairman Terry Daubney stated that there was a new national residents panel for the Housing Ombudsman Service and two panel members had applied to join. There was limited information about it so far. There was a discussion around the fact that for some tenants, lack of access to technology had prevented their participation in the panel up to that point. There was also a discussion of when there should be a review of Covid policies, just in case of another lockdown.

It was also stated that the Government had set out Covid regulations for care homes but not Senior Living Accommodation where residents are independent and some people had been isolated for months and as a result they were at risk of mental health issues such as loneliness and depression. The committee wondered how these people could be able to socialise more. It was stated that the people living in Senior Living Accommodation in Cranleigh had been encouraged to use digital services. It was also stated that the Community and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee were going to look at the wellbeing of elderly people.

## **RESOLVED**

To highlight the committee's concerns regarding the isolation of elderly people to the Community and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The committee endorsed the comments by the Chairman of the Tenants' Panel.

The Chairman of the Tenants' Panel would report to the committee again at its November 2021 meeting.

The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities stated that commuted sums funding collected under Section 106 agreements had been used to subsidise two homes in Cranleigh, allowing them to be let at social rents.

The Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) modular homes project providing temporary accommodation would be part funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Council through commuted sums. A contractor had been identified. Another bidding round housing for homeless households would be introduced early in 2021.

Turning to the Private Sector Housing adaptations work, applications for grants were being received again having tailed off due to the pandemic. One reason had been that surveyors could not enter homes. A new officer had been appointed to promote Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and ensure that the money was spent. The team were also working on trying to bring empty homes back into use.

The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities explained that the Council had a duty to arrange funerals for people who had no one else to do so.

The new Housing Strategy would be a major item of work for the service. The Government had introduced "affordable rent" and this was actually very hard for many people to afford. Work was being undertaken on setting a "Waverley Rent" priced somewhere between social rent and affordable rent. The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities would bring the draft Strategy to a future Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee were very pleased that homeless numbers were so low. They felt it was a fantastic achievement that the Council had prevented or relieved homelessness for 73 households in a quarter.

It was commented that in future it would not be possible to build houses with gas central heating and that a Task and Finish group were looking into housing design standards. The Asset Manager commented that heating was the area where reduction could take place. It was stated that the Task and Finish group would be able to have an input into elements of the designs at the Ockford Ridge development.

Councillors asked for further information regarding the two off target service plan actions. The Service Improvement Manager stated that she aimed for the work on complaints and communal areas to be completed by the end of March 2021.

The Service Improvement Manager presented the report and stated that the service had had to adapt to Covid such as detailed above regarding the work with the Tenants' Panel.

The Government had published a clear Charter for Social Housing Residents.

The Service Improvement Manager noted that the service had failed to meet its performance targets due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It was felt that a rent target of 1% was more realistic for 2021/22.

The Committee had requested more information regarding responsive repairs. The report shared information on the number of jobs and complaints.

In future the service proposed to report on the average number of days taken to complete repairs and the number of repairs over 28 days.

There were 35-40 empty homes in January 2021. Part of the backlog had been caused by the fact that people had been unable to travel during the pandemic in order to clear deceased relatives' homes. It was estimated that it would take a year from the start of the pandemic to get back to normal.

The Housing Delivery Manager noted that they were looking into the biodiversity of larger sites such as Ockford Ridge Site B.

53. SERVICE PLANS (Agenda item 8.)

As mentioned previously, the Head of Housing Delivery and Communities said that the new Housing Strategy was the large area of work for his service. There was a meeting scheduled with Executive members in the week commencing 15 March. The majority of the strategy would focus on delivering new homes which were needed in the borough. The strategy would look at what kinds of homes were needed and at what level. The Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee would have an opportunity to comment on the draft strategy. The Chairman commented on the importance of the location when siting new homes.

The Committee requested an informal briefing on the new housing strategy prior to it coming to the Committee.

The Service Improvement Manager said that the Housing Operations service plan had five themes:

- Financially robust
- Meeting the needs of tenants
- Putting residents first and our staff to be skilled and professional
- Being recognised as an effective partner
- Improving customer experience

The Service Improvement Manager was very mindful of the white paper which came out in November 2020 especially about making sure residents were having their voices heard.

There was a discussion about whether the target on partnership working needed to be firmer. The Service Improvement Manager said she wanted the flexibility to work where needed and support national and/or local health and wellbeing initiatives.

The Committee discussed maintenance targets, carbon neutrality and upgrading existing stock.

54. VERBAL UPDATE ON RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND VOIDS CONTRACT (Agenda item 9.)

The Housing Operations Manager provided an update on the Responsive Repairs and Voids Contract. The project was on track.

55. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (Agenda item 10.)

The Chairman stated that the Asset Management Strategy must align with the new design standards.

It was stated that the Interim Asset Manager had been made full time and permanent.

The Asset Manager gave a presentation. He highlighted the fact that there needed to be accurate data to inform the strategy. There needed to be a data health check, stock condition surveying, the optimising of asset performance, the development of an Asset Management Strategy / Energy Action plan and the development of an Interim Action Plan and timescales. The data health check would validate and identify the surveying priorities in advance of work on the Asset Management Strategy.

FFT had been commissioned to carry out a health check of general stock conditions. This would be completed by mid-April 2021.

Energy data would be separately validated to understand reliability of RDSAP which was the basic level with ten to fifteen data items compared with EPC which had eighty to ninety elements and would therefore give a better understanding and help enable better decisions. This assessment was already underway.

Covid had led to a 20% backlog on condition surveys. 1200 properties required a survey on top of the 20% backlog. Data was currently out of date by five years.

The key aim of the Asset Management Strategy would be optimising asset performance to ensure the housing stock met the needs of the Borough.

Stock performance would be assessed through financial and social sustainability criteria. Dwellings which would struggle to meet acceptable performance criteria would be identified.

A methodology would be provided for operating a programme of options appraisals which would focus on asset performance and refurbishment options.

An action plan would be drawn up to implement priorities. The Strategy would aim to support the Council's target of being net zero by 2030.

- An interim action plan would be produced in 2021/22.
- A data health check would be carried out in April 2021
- Stock condition surveying would be carried out in May – June 2021
- The Asset Management Strategy would be developed between August and November 2021
- The Strategy would go to Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and Council between December 2021 and February 2022

Data will be collected on all the assets held by the Council. The Council needs to know the reliability of any equipment installed and maintenance will be important.

56. THE RECOVERY CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION PROJECT (Agenda item 11.)

The Recovery, Change and Transformation Project started in April 2020. Updates have been given at all the meetings of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee since then.

Each work area had been reviewed and adapted to recover service and deliver in a Covid compliant way.

Online documents were being developed to reduce social contact to let homes. There had been problems accessing homes to do gas safety checks and where necessary, legal action had been taken.

Services were recovered following problems caused by the pandemic. The Recovery Change and Transformation Board had agreed to close the project as they had recovered services.

The Chairman thanked the Service Improvement Manager and her team for their work.

57. VERBAL UPDATE ON HOUSING DEVELOPMENT (Agenda item 12.)

The Housing Development Manager shared a table detailing the work of her service area. The service had been working with their contractors regarding biodiversity and environmental projects.

58. HOUSING DESIGN STANDARDS TASK AND FINISH GROUP (Agenda item 13.)

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the third meeting of the Housing Design Task and Finish Group had looked at zero carbon issues. It was stated that the design standards needed to be quite flexible. An external expert, the Head of Sustainability from Thakeham Homes, was coming to the next meeting. A residents' survey was also being developed. The Chairman reported that it was a lively group and that it had done a lot of fact finding. The outcome would hopefully be some design standards to see the Council through the next few years.

59. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 14.)

The Committee asked for there to be regular asset management updates from the Asset Manager.

Committee members were invited to suggest items for the next few meetings. The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities stated that the Housing Development Strategy would be one such item.

It was suggested that the Chairman of the Tenants' Panel should see whether the tenants wished to raise any issues. The Chairman reminded the Committee that a survey of tenants was being commissioned.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.18 pm**

**Chairman**