

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR MONEY &
CUSTOMER SERVICE - 24 MAY 2021

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

Present

Cllr Joan Heagin (Vice Chairman, in the
Chair)
Cllr Roger Blishen
Cllr Jerome Davidson
Cllr Jerry Hyman

Cllr Peter Marriott
Cllr Stephen Mulliner
Cllr Peter Nicholson

Cllr John Gray (Substitute)

Apologies

Cllr Peter Martin

1. CONFIRMATION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 1.)

Councillor Peter Martin was confirmed as Chairman of the committee for the forthcoming council year with Councillor Heagin as the Vice Chairman.

2. MINUTES (Agenda item 2.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8th March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 3.)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Martin who was substituted by Councillor John Gray.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 4.)

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

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 5.)

There were none.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 7.)

There were none.

7. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 6.)

The Scrutiny Officer reported that the completion of the first round of Community Infrastructure Levy bidding was too recent for a report to be available so this was moved onto future items on the agenda.

8. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 (Agenda item 8.)

As the information had been republished as a supplement, the committee wanted clarification on what information had changed from the original version. The Policy and Performance Officer clarified that the only change was the addition of annexe 1, the quarter 4 performance report. There were no changes in the covering report to the proposed performance indicators.

The Committee requested that if the same document was sent out more than once that tracked changes were shown.

The Service Heads whose service areas fell within the remit of Value for Money and Customer Service Overview and Scrutiny reported to the Committee. The Head of Business Transformation said that the successes of his service area during the last quarter were that the IT Strategy was approved at Full Council. The Staff Travel Project was still ongoing, the Horizon IT system was introduced and the Future Office Working Project was ongoing which aimed for a smaller footprint going forward. This was partly as a response to the Covid pandemic. Seven indicators were being proposed for this service area which would be put forward at the next meeting of the committee. The performance indicators for Business Transformation were particularly aimed at Customer Services. The data collection methods for these indicators needed to be established. The Vice Chairman stated that it would be useful to know what indicators were being considered and the Head of Business Transformation said he would circulate them before the next committee meeting.

It was noted that there were a lot of phone calls during the Covid pandemic regarding missed bins and that there was a fully automated way of reporting missed bins.

There was a discussion surrounding the roll out of the Horizon IT software. The Committee wanted more information on the impact of the introduction of the system in Planning and a report was requested.

It was noticed that there had been a dip in the ability to collect council tax and business rates as there had been pressure on peoples' ability to pay during the pandemic. Reigate Borough Council were acting on Waverley's behalf with council tax collection and this was working well.

It was explained that Waverley Borough Council absorbed a proportion of the deficit in uncollected Council Tax and Business Rates in proportion to how it was allocated to the different bodies on whose behalf we collect the money. Waverley absorbed the deficit on behalf of the town and parish councils.

9. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REVIEW REPORT (Agenda item 9.)

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that there were suggested new performance indicators.

There was a discussion about the suggested performance indicator F6 – Net Return on Property. It was stated that Waverley had a new Property Investment Strategy. One of the Committee thought the indicator should not include historic information.

It was also felt that cost information should be separated out. The Head of Finance and Property felt that all the properties in the Council's portfolio were investment properties whether they were historic or recent acquisitions. They all provided a return. He did not feel there was a difference between ones the Council had had for a long time and recent ones. There was just one portfolio for investment assets.

There was a discussion around MRP (Minimum Revenue Provision) and how management costs were estimated and whether they featured in the proposed calculation. The Head of Finance confirmed that MRP wasn't attributed to a particular asset within the portfolio. It was considered when a purchase was made and when Waverley borrowed money. It applied to the overall provision not individual assets. The Asset Management team looked after all the assets in Waverley's portfolio.

The Committee were unclear on what was envisaged regarding property information for the performance report in terms of how it would be presented and how it differed from the property investment information which was also supplied to the Value for Money Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The committee felt the indicators had to be meaningful and had to relate to corporate targets.

There was a discussion about the best way to measure whether the Land Charges provision was effective.

There was further discussion surrounding PG3b regarding freedom of information requests. It was stated that it was possible to respond saying that we couldn't respond yet. It was felt that a more useful performance indicator would tell us how many requests were responded to with the information that was asked for.

The Committee suggested a review of the new performance indicators after 12 months. The Committee also suggested having a brief description of definitions such as subject access requests. It was also felt that it would be useful to see trends rather than snapshots where possible.

It was clarified that the suggested indicator C4 – Percentage of complete building control applications checked within 10 days came under Commercial Service's remit not Planning's. The Committee wanted to know what issue the proposed indicator was trying to address as they had had complaints from residents about land charges. The Committee thought the layout of the indicators could be improved so that all the related ones were grouped together.

The Committee felt that the target for the percentage of building control applications checked within 10 days was too low and that a higher percentage would be better. The Corporate Policy Manager thought that the applications had to be processed within a certain time. She said she would circulate information clarifying this to the Committee.

It was clarified that Environment Overview and Scrutiny considered the Performance Indicators for Planning but Value for Money Overview and Scrutiny considered Economic Development. There were not yet any established performance indicators for Economic Development although the service was keen to establish some.

10. RECOVERY, CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION PROJECT EVALUATIONS
(Agenda item 10.)

Projects were set up in April 2020 to focus on the recovery from the pandemic. There had been ten projects which had all now closed by March 2021. Some had been assimilated into the new Business as Usual work plans. A few elements were still ongoing such as the Return to Office Policy element which was still being reviewed by the Where Work Happens group led by Business Transformation. The Burs Development Project was also ongoing.

It was stated that the Business Transformation projects had already been ongoing such as reducing Waverley Borough Council's office space but were brought to the forefront by the pandemic.

There was a discussion surrounding lessons learnt from the Covid pandemic. The majority of the Committee found the more detailed sections on lessons learnt to be helpful. The Development Programme Manager stated that the team were building lessons learnt into their project processes.

The Chief Executive stated that the Covid response needed to be mainstreamed into the business. He also stated that the funding challenge to the council had been compounded by Covid.

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The Committee noted the report and felt that there had been a lot of unscheduled work as a result of the pandemic and on the whole the Council had responded well.

11. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (Agenda item 11.)

The Head of Planning and Economic Development stated that work on the Economic Development Strategy had been suspended in April 2020 to focus on recovery from the pandemic.

A Covid Action Plan was approved by the Executive. This would cover the period from October 2020 to October 2021.

Work would commence on the new Economic Development Plan in November 2021. It would consider BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) and more strategic aims.

The Economic Development Team had worked to distribute government funding via business grants. Grants of £111,000 had been allocated in the present financial year.

The service purchased a database to get information on all local businesses. This information would also be fed into the strategy later in the year.

Government funds had been granted to support hard hit sectors and those wanting to diversify.

The Economic Development Team had also been signposting people to different partners as there were only 1.4 full time equivalent officers in the team. The team had been looking at connectivity issues and encouraging green businesses and encouraging businesses to be more local. The team would be reliant on consultants for some projects.

The Council were awarded Additional Restrictions Funding of £500,000. 10% of the original grant would be used to support business support activities.

An Economic Development Communication Strategy would be produced for November 2021.

Additional funds for Economic Development were approved at Executive on 30 March 2021.

Some of the committee found the information hard to follow and they were told that this was because it was an action plan and a living document rather than a report to Overview and Scrutiny. The committee felt it needed to make sense to readers on Waverley's Corporate site. It needed to be clear whether money had been spent and about what the deliverables were. There was no context to work out whether what was stated was good or not. It was further suggested that there needed to be more context in the report.

12. WORKPLACE PROFILE UPDATE (Agenda item 12.)

The profile gave a breakdown of the workforce and drew some conclusions about what had happened in the previous year. Highlights included the increasing age of the workforce which was something which was not specific to Waverley. It was going to appoint apprentices. The gender gap was slowly decreasing but more was unlikely to happen until women were better represented in higher management.

Waverley had various methods to support the disabled but a surprising number of people didn't report their disability although Waverley tried to encourage them to do so.

There had been an active response to Black Lives Matter and the Council was continuing to support this. The Council supported groups with protected characteristics.

There had been 39 absences in the past year relating to Covid. 16 of these were reactions to vaccines. There had been two cases of Long Covid. It was stated that early on in the pandemic there had been no testing so there was no accurate data.

It was stated that staff turnover was very low due to the state of the economy. There was higher turnover at lower levels which was usual. The Council needed to encourage career progression for younger people.

It was explained that as a result of the Equality Act there was no longer a statutory retirement age. Waverley had flexible retirement. Flexible working helped to retain older employees as well as younger people. Nationally the figure for part time working was 24%. Waverley's figure was higher.

There was a question regarding the quality of work done from home. The Head of Policy and Governance stated that working from home in the future would not solely be based on staff preference but also based on what the service needed and the quality of performance. Staff were given objectives and performance was managed through an annual performance management process. Management did look at whether staff were achieving targets not just presenteeism.

The Committee were impressed with the Domestic Abuse Policy.

13. PROPERTY INVESTMENT UPDATE (Agenda item 13.)

The Head of Finance gave information on live negotiations and on the Commercial Redevelopment of The Bury's.

There was a question on the valuation of lines 5 and 6 of the document. The Head of Finance confirmed that the valuation stood.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.47 pm

Chairman