

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 8 JUNE 2021

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

**Present**

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)  
Cllr Christine Baker  
Cllr Patricia Ellis  
Cllr David Else

Cllr Michael Goodridge  
Cllr Michaela Wicks  
Cllr Jacquie Keen

Cllr Jerry Hyman (Substitute)

**Apologies**

Cllr Peter Marriott and Dennis Smith

**Also Present**

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

Councillor Richard Seaborne was confirmed as Chairman of the Committee for the forthcoming municipal year with Councillor Peter Marriott as Vice Chairman.

61. MINUTES (Agenda item 2.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 9 March 2021 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Peter Marriott who was substituted by Councillor Jerry Hyman and from Tenants Panel representative Dennis Smith who was substituted by Gillian Martin.

The Chairman also enquired whether a replacement to former Councillor Cole had been selected from the Liberal Democrat Group and he was informed by the Leader that this had not yet been decided on.

63. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 4.)

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

64. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions from members of the public.

65. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 6.)

There were no questions from Members.

66. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 (Agenda item 7.)

The Service Improvement Manager presented the Quarter 4 report as the Head of Housing Delivery had given his apologies for the meeting. She explained that the performance information was for January, February and March 2021 so that was for the end of the financial year 2020 – 2021.

Highlights included:

- 37 new homes had been built by the Council at Site A at Ockford Ridge.
- Planning permission was gained for 6 further WBC homes in Chiddingfold
- Next Step funding has been secured for two new modular Passivhaus homes in Farncombe, and supported with WBC Commuted Sums Council funding.
- 3 new homes had been acquired on a developer site through S106 agreement as well.
- The Housing Strategy Enabling Team supported the delivery of 130 new homes throughout the financial year (37 by WBC, 93 by other providers).
- They also worked on the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document which was adopted 27.04.21. It gives clear affordable housing guidelines for developers, agents and planners when assessing development opportunities.
- The Commuted Sums Fund has also been used to provide 2 x social rented homes in Cranleigh (Southern).
- Rough Sleeper Funding was secured for an Outreach Worker and a Tenancy Support Officer and some bed spaces were provided. The service were preparing for an expected increase in homelessness as the eviction rules for private rented accommodation were changed.
- The Private Sector team have seen a reduction in requests for inspections due to covid restrictions, but there have been more requests for public funeral and disabled facilities grants.

There was a question about when the Supplementary Planning Document would be in place and the Committee was told that it was adopted at the Annual Council Meeting on 27 April 2021.

It was suggested that there should be a target for maximising the number of social rent affordable social housing homes delivered. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager said this would be picked up in the new Housing Strategy and it could be monitored going forward.

There was a question regarding the independent viability consultants mentioned on page 41 of the performance report, the committee wanted to know how this would be set up and whether there would be a scale of fees. Viability fees are paid for by the developer. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager stated that these issues were being worked on with the Procurement Officer. Four consultants have been secured to set up a viability panel and where an applicant for a planning application submitted a planning viability case, work could now be rotated fairly and the Council were less likely to encounter conflict of interest issues and challenges when developers said affordable housing wasn't viable on a particular site.

The Committee Chairman commented that the performance information had no mention of improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon dioxide emissions and he wanted to see that in future reports including in the commentary section.

There was a question regarding the low number of affordable homes granted planning consent and whether it was because of a low number of applications submitted. Following the meeting, the Head of Planning & Economic Development confirmed that the number of major applications delivering substantial numbers of affordable homes, for which full or outline permission was granted during the year 2020-21, was lower than average. In future, further analysis can be provided by commenting on whether schemes have triggered a requirement for affordable homes but are not providing (e.g. for viability reasons) or if an application including affordable housing provision has been refused.

It was stated that Housing Operations had focussed on customer feedback during the quarter and they had done some "lessons learnt" work and an internal review of a repair case.

Two members of the Tenants Panel had been accepted onto the Housing Ombudsman's Service Resident's Panel so they could feed back nationally regarding how complaints were managed across housing organisations.

The service successfully went through the rent increase process. They also relaunched the My Account solution where a tenant can go online to check their rent balance.

All Housing Staff had completed diversity and inclusion training and five members of staff had completed health and safety training, gaining qualifications to help ensure Waverley were managing and maintaining safe homes.

There was a discussion around whether there was meant to be a target for HO6 - % of tenancy audits completed against scheduled in a quarter. The Chairman noted that in the introductory information, the target for HO6 was 90%. The Service Improvement Manager confirmed there was a typo in the table and there was a target in place.

There was a question about whether the backlog of vacant homes had been cleared in line with the target of doing so by Spring 2021. It was stated that the backlog had reduced and continued to decline.

It was stated that the Tenants Involvement Strategy was being checked with Plain English to gain a clarity mark.

The Housing Operations Service were trying to bring voids down to a manageable number. The Head of Housing Operations said the target was under 30 and currently the figure was about 38. He stated that the numbers went up and down and were not consistent. The Chairman asked for it to be recorded that the committee were appreciative of the efforts of the housing team in trying to keep the void numbers low.

A service update was included in the rent statements asking all tenants to keep in touch and to let them know what they were doing well and less well.

Some of the Committee were concerned about the lack of data regarding responsive repairs and the impact that this had on tenants. The Head of Housing Operations said the situation regarding repairs had improved since March 2020 and the backlog of repairs was down and the turnaround time regarding repairs had improved. Complaints regarding repairs had gone down considerably and the data to back this up would be provided in the next quarterly report.

There was concern from the Committee regarding gas safety where tenants would not let inspectors into their homes because they were shielding. It was stated that five tenants were shielding. The Head of Housing Operations stated that the team had worked with tenants to persuade them to let gas safety inspectors in. Vaccinations had made it easier to persuade tenants to let people in to carry out inspections. They were down to two no access situations.

There was a question about work on communal areas and it was stated that there was a system whereby every communal area was inspected and cleaned on a monthly basis. The Head of Service would report back on the mechanism to advise tenants of communal work requests and actions.

There was a discussion about repairs to pipework to prevent Legionnaires disease at a senior living scheme. It was going well although there had been one incident of flooding and the tenant had been moved into temporary accommodation.

## RESOLVED

That

1. The new Housing Delivery Report will contain information on energy efficiency and carbon reduction
2. A measure will be developed to record whether or not repairs have been carried out on communal areas.

## 67. ANNUAL KPI REVIEW (Agenda item 8.)

There were currently no new indicators for Housing Delivery and Communities although there might be some in the new Housing Strategy. There were some new indicators proposed and some changes to the targets for Housing Operations:

HO1 - rent arrears as a percentage of total established gross debit. It was proposed to change this target from 0.7% to 1%.

HO4 – average number of days to complete a repair.

- Average number of days to complete a repair

HO5 – Percentage of jobs not completed within 28 days

There was a discussion around whether the target for HO1 should be increased, with some of the Committee being unhappy with making a target easier to achieve. It was stated that nationally the average rent arrears were 3.68%. The Head of Housing Operations stated that with an increase in Universal Credit claims the service may not return to pre COVID 19 collection rates. Universal Credit payments take longer to reach peoples' accounts, rent arrears were going to be higher going forward.

There was a further discussion around the first part of indicator HO5 which was "Was the repair completed right first time?". Some of the Committee felt this was too vague. The Head of Housing Operations said that the definition of first time was from the tenant's point of view. The Chief Executive suggested making the definition slightly longer and clearer regarding what was being measured.

The Service Improvement Manager stated that they would reinstate the independent survey of tenants regarding their experience of responsive repairs when a new contractor starts.

It was suggested regarding HD4 that the indicator should show the number of affordable homes delivered by Waverley and those delivered by others separately. The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager said this was already recorded so the information could be given to the Committee.

The Chairman wanted to see an indicator on energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions in Waverley's properties.

## RESOLVED

That:

Housing Delivery and Communities (Housing Delivery only) – The Committee agreed to no changes to indicators HD1 (NI), HD2, HD3. The Committee suggested a split of the indicator HD4 to sub indicators showing exact numbers of affordable homes delivered by Waverley Borough Council and those delivered by other providers. The officers accepted the suggestions and new indicators HD4a (WBC) and HD4b (other providers) will be introduced from Q1 2021/22.

Housing Operations – The Committee agreed to no changes to indicators HO2, HO3, HO6 and to endorse a change of target for the HO1 from 0.7% to 1%. The officers also proposed introduction of two new interim indicators to replace existing indicators HO4 (rate of the service received) and HO5 (repair completed right first time), and these are HO4b (average number of days to complete the repair) and HO5b (% of jobs not completed within 28 days). The Committee endorsed the introduction of these new indicators from Q1 2021/22.

HO5 would be re-worded to provide more clarity

The Asset Management Strategy would include new indicator(s) to measure energy efficiency and reductions in emissions

## 68. HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT (Agenda item 9.)

The Housing Strategy and Enabling Manager explained that they dealt with new affordable housing from pre-application to delivery. A lot of work was with housing associations, during the planning process. An Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document has been adopted at Annual Council on 27 April 2021 to support this process.

The current Housing Strategy was originally written to cover 2018 to 2023. However, the Executive has requested a new strategy to reflect the new Corporate Plan and declaration of a Climate Emergency. The current strategy is quite broad

and includes private sector housing and homelessness. Although at an early stage, the new strategy will have a stronger focus on Council and Housing Association new build and the affordability and sustainability of these homes. For example, affordable rents, set at 80% are not actually affordable to some in housing need. The team are commissioning new research into what is affordable to the end user.

In 2020-21 130 new affordable homes had been provided. This was not as high as the 150 completed in 2019-20, but higher than the average for the past ten years (81 per annum).

In 2019-20 5% of new homes were developed by the Council. In 2020-21, this has increased to 37%, largely due to the development at Ockford Ridge. Last year only 1% of new affordable homes completed were for social rent, this year 28%; again due to the Ockford Ridge but also 2 homes at Horsham Road.

Most of the houses developed in the last financial year were two or three bedroom houses. This will differ each year, depending on the tenure / bed size mix of schemes which complete. For example, Brightwells will start to complete this financial year and the scheme is all shared ownership / one and two bedroom flats.

There was a question about the net gain of houses at Ockford Ridge (Site A) and the Housing Development Manager stated that for this site the gain was 15 houses.

It was stated that the modular homes to be delivered at Badgers Close were to be delivered to Passivhaus standards and the Council had obtained grant funding from MHCLG to fund part of the cost of the scheme with additional funding secured from Commuted Sums.

There was a question about whether the private sector housing survey would involve going into peoples' homes and it was stated that it was a desktop exercise.

The Chairman asked for it to be recorded that the Committee looked forward to the next strategy and thanked officers.

69. REPORT FROM THE HOUSING DESIGN STANDARDS TASK AND FINISH GROUP (Agenda item 10.)

Councillor David Else who had been the Chairman of the Housing Design Task and Finish Group introduced this agenda item and stated that there had been a review of the 2018 standards in order to design improved environmentally friendly and affordable homes.

The Committee thought the report was very good.

There was a discussion around the design of letterboxes and methods for storing parcels with the Committee wanting to know what was behind that recommendation. It was explained that the Task and Finish Group were not providing a solution, they were setting a challenge for architects and builders.

There was further discussion regarding recommendation 17 about electric vehicle charging points. It was stated that after 2030 it would be illegal to sell fossil fuelled vehicles. The recommendation was about making sure the infrastructure was there.

There was further discussion regarding recommendation 18 about improving walkways and cycle routes with a view to designing out crime.

It was explained that the standards would be updated every few years.

It was noted that there were no female councillors on task and finish group. It was stated that a the Community and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been approached so that there would be links to their work but the person from that group who put themselves forward was also a male councillor.

The Housing Development Manager gave a brief explanation of the Passivhaus standard.

#### RESOLVED

That the Committee were happy for the report to go forward to the Executive.

70. HOUSING MAINTENANCE - RESPONSE, REPAIRS AND VOIDS CONTRACT  
(Agenda item 11.)

It was reported that the service were on target for a new contract to start around March 2022.

71. HOUSING - RELATED COMPLAINTS 2019/20 (Agenda item 12.)

There were no questions regarding the report which had been provided to the committee by the Service Improvement Manager.

72. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 13.)

The Scrutiny Officer stated that the future of the four Overview and Scrutiny Committees was in flux. The Asset Management Strategy and the Mental Health Strategy would come to the committee in September 2021.

Officers were actioned to bring a scoping report for a task and finish group on the allocations policy to the September meeting. A number of members expressed an interest in working on the review.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.26 pm**

**Chairman**