

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - POLICY - 25 JANUARY 2022

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

Present

Cllr Stephen Mulliner (Chairman)
Cllr Brian Adams
Cllr Roger Blishen
Cllr Jerome Davidson

Cllr Chris Howard
Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr John Neale
Cllr Peter Nicholson

Apologies

Cllr Joan Heagin, Cllr George Hesse and Cllr George Wilson

Also Present

Cllr Paul Follows, Cllr Mark Merryweather, Cllr Richard Seaborne

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 1)

Councillor George Hesse had decided to leave the committee. Apologies were received from Councillor Joan Heagin, Councillor Peter Nicholson and Councillor George Wilson.

15 MINUTES (Agenda item 2)

The minutes for the meeting on 23 November 2021 were agreed to be an accurate record.

16 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

17 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

18 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5)

There were no questions from Members, but Councillor Seaborne wished to speak on item eight.

19 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 6)

The Scrutiny Officer reported that there was an update on part one of the Work Programme. They had received replies from Surrey Heartlands CCG and Surrey County Council. The Scrutiny Officer reported that he had sat in on a discussion that Surrey Heartlands had with the Planning team and it seemed like this committee had helped to move the process along and it did seem that the CCG

were taking the question of CIL bids seriously and had bought new software to help identify opportunities to bid for CIL funding. In response to a request from the Committee, the Scrutiny Officer agreed to circulate the responses that had been received from the CCG and Surrey County Council. Where responses had not yet been received the Scrutiny Officer asked whether anyone had suggestions for contacts.

The Scrutiny Officer also reported on part three that there had been a new recurring item added on hybrid working.

On part four on the task and finish groups, the Scrutiny Officer reported that the ONS working group on housing allocations should be finished in time for the March meeting cycle at which point they would not have any more ongoing task and finish groups. He therefore invited ideas for further task and finish groups which the Committee might want to explore. The Chairman stated that they would discuss the possibility of a working group on the housing revenue account.

20 GENERAL BUDGET 2022-23 AND MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2022/23 - 2025/26 (Agenda item 7)

The item was introduced by the Financial Services Manager. She stated that the Committee had in front of them the general fund budget 22/23 and the medium-term financial plan for the general fund. She took them through the key items in the report. She stated that the report set out the medium-term financial plan for the next four years building in key assumptions that they had made around the reversal of the Covid-19 impact, inflation on contracts and pay and she stated that the other key item was the fair funding review that they were expecting in the next financial year. She stated that it also built in some known changes that they would be having over the next year and beyond to government funding for 22/23. She stated that the first annex, took them through four years assumptions and detailed the forecast budget shortfall over the next four years which was a total of £5.2 million. She stated it also detailed the measures proposed to help meet some of the budget shortfall and included some targets for services which had been scrutinized and which would be closely monitored throughout the period of the MTFP.

She stated that Annex 2 set out the specific 22/23 budget year with details of the movements on this budget in Annex 3. Then Annex 4 covered the fees and charges. The capital programme and proposed funding were Annex 5 which was the key item around the revenue contribution to that capital programme which impacted the general fund revenue summary and then the report detailed a lot of the changes through the annexes but also the risks to the budget foreseen at that stage.

There was a question on inflation. It was stated that the officers had given the Committee some additional papers which gave some indication of inflation and looking at those and comparing them to Annex 3 some of the Committee were confused as to what the analysis was. The analysis on page 43 gave an inflation level of £905,000 and indicated inflation increments and elsewhere they had figures for the National Insurance impact with contracts of £380,000 and utilities and staffing at £529,000. Councillors wanted to know what the contributory factors to inflation were and to have greater degree of detail on the contracts and the individual areas such as the leisure centre and the refuse contract.

The Committee also wanted to see more breakdown regarding car parks revenues as they were not able to follow them year by year. Councillors were interested in the fact that the full year increase for next year for car parks was £730,000 and noted that it was about a 14% increase over the pre-Covid levels which was quite a steep increase. The Committee did not think that was particularly clearly drawn out when they were taking those decisions or ratifying them earlier in the year.

There was a question on the figure for car parks recovery because there was a £730,000 increase due to the car parking fees increases and there was a £265,000 recovery from Covid-19 which looked to be quite low in comparison to the following year of £820,000. Councillors felt that the £265,000 should be a higher figure now releasing more funds elsewhere. They could also see £250,000 going in for maintenance

The Committee asked the Head of Finance and Property to clarify the current position with car parking income. They thought that in a full year income was about £5.1 million and it fell to something a little over half that in the first of the Covid years. They wanted to know the estimate for the current financial year and the extent of the government grant aid in the both the past year and the current year.

The Head of Finance and Property said that for the car parks the Covid recovery budget for the next financial year was based on an increasing usage of 70% capacity for the first six months and 75% for the second six months of the year. Omicron variant over the last couple of months had affected figures. Officers felt that the forecast for Covid recovery for car parks was careful but realistic for the next financial year. It was being impacted by working from home and they expected that working from home would slowly reduce over the next two three years. They felt that people were also returning to shops and the high street. The Head of Finance and Property stated that in the current year the actual income levels were within 10 or 15% of where they were pre-Covid. The Committee felt that as the service had put up the prices that would influence the Council's income, and they should therefore be somewhat nearer pre-Covid figures. The Head of Finance and Property said that they wouldn't get back to a full hundred percent in 22/23 it would more likely be in 23/24.

The Committee understood that the bulk of the national insurance increase for the next year was covered by the government grant. The Committee wanted to know what the level of government grant had been in the financial year 19/20 and where they were for 21/22 versus what was expected.

Some of the Committee thought that for the big income items it would be very useful to have the actual absolute figures in future for clarity.

The Head of Finance and Property stated that the government had deferred again their assessment of the whole business rate funding and retention and fair funding review. The figures had been confirmed at the same level and the Council's core funding would not change year on year.

The Head of Finance and Property stated that the services grant broadly covered the additional NI impact but it did fall short.

He explained that the new homes bonus was not part of Waverley core funding. It was an amount that Waverley and other Councils received if the net growth in new

homes in the borough year on year exceeded a certain threshold. The Government had committed to review this in 22/23, however this had been deferred by a year. Finance officers were expecting this to reduce significantly but the increase from £977,000 to £1,613,000 was for the purpose of the Council's MTPF, a one-off increase. The delay enabled Finance to introduce some one-off additional items into the 22/23 budget but doesn't give any certainty beyond that.

The Head of Finance and Property stated that the new homes bonus was a guaranteed amount as it was pre-calculated and pre-set for the year, so the Council's government funding would come in the current year as per the budget.

The Head of Finance and Property stated that they had worked very closely with Places Leisure to push them to give Waverley the benefit of the recovery that they were experiencing in the usage of the leisure centres. He stated that if the projections held up until the end of March they would not need to draw on the one million pounds of contingency backed by reserves that they put into the budget for the current year.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman were supplied with information regarding the inflation assumptions. Some of the Committee thought this didn't tally with the Annex three figures for inflation. Finance stated it reconciled to Annex One where there was a line there that showed inflation at £959,000. The Head of Finance said there were a number of contracts attracting inflation so it would be useful if the Committee could be more specific on which contracts they were interested in seeing inflation on. He said he would circulate further information.

On page 41 of the papers two Covid-19 government grants were shown for £457,000 and £460,000. The Committee wanted to know how they compared to what Waverley expected. The Financial Services Manager said the first grant on page 41 which was the government grant towards costs was a fixed amount so they had received exactly as budgeted. The government grant towards income was a fees and charges compensation grant so the government extended that scheme into the first three months of the 21/22 financial year and Waverley hadn't received the final payout for that so did not know exactly what would be paid but the claim submitted was slightly more than £460,000. It was expected imminently.

Some Councillors who were not part of the Committee but who had been invited to attend due to the Committee discussing the budget put questions:

- Whether there were any costs associated with the ward boundary changes
- As Waverley moved towards going paperless, what was the budget for additional technical support for councillors /a review of digital platform as fit for purpose
- What was the budget for cyber security

Officers advised that the boundary review had a one-off cost of £20,000 that officers had estimated would be the amount that would be required for the Council's system providers to alter the boundaries. For a Council system with parameters based around the current boundaries, such as the revenues and benefits; and election service software, there would be a cost associated with any changes.

Regarding cyber security, it was stated that Waverley employ an officer who is a cyber lead. Officers had recently secured funding from the Government for the fight

against cybercrime and the government had been promoting anti cyber-crime work by local authorities. The IT Manager regularly applied for and secured funding.

There was a bid of £30,000 for the costs of moving to a fully paperless approach. Some of the Committee did not support a fully paperless approach and said that every member of the committee was using their paper copies, and some felt they could not have properly prepared for the meeting without them.

The Vice Chairman who was not able to be present had submitted questions in advance of the meeting. She noted the high take-up of the £500,000 council tax hardship Covid impact grant which was very much higher than previous years and she noted there was a £50,000 addition to the hardship fund for the coming year but questioned whether it was sufficient. She also wanted to know what would happen to the unused £155,000 of the original Covid impact grant. The Head of Finance and Property stated that the hardship monies that Waverley received from the Government was just over half a million pounds. It was part of the Covid scheme and there was not a take-up of it in respect of people asking for hardship, it was an automatic award of £150 to everybody on the council tax support scheme. The balance of that money had been kept back from the section 13a hardship which was the £5,000 pounds in the budget. Over about the last seven years Waverley had about £30,000 however there had not been the demand so £5,000 had been retained in the budget. With the pandemic the view was taken that there could be more demand for this money going forward and therefore the money was kept back on the balance sheet to fund any hardship applications. The revenues; benefits and housing benefit teams actively looked for cases that would potentially meet the criteria. The additional £50,000 proposed in recognition of the rising household bill costs that were being experienced by many residents.

Regarding the recommendation for fees and charges, the Committee wanted clarity on what appeared to be discrepancies or anomalies between two sets of planning charges on pages 55 and 56 of the pack. Finance officers said they would check these figures.

Another Councillor not on the Committee but invited to join due to the discussion of the budget asked how sensitive the MTFP projections were to inflation rate assumptions. The finance officers stated that in the next year which was the key year for the council to set next year's budget they felt that inflation provision was sufficient.

Finance Officers also stated that there was a large pay award that was not resolved yet. There were also CPI-based inflation uplifts that were pegged against Waverley's big contracts. The contractual side of the general fund which attracted inflation was about £14 or £15 million. It was noted however that different contracts were attracting different rates

Councillors also noted that at 31 March 2021 there was an increase in the general fund usable reserves from £14 million to £27 million. It was stated that at least £12 million of that related to Government grants which were of a temporary nature. Councillors wanted to know how quickly those would leave the general fund usable reserves. Finance clarified that it was support from the government towards council tax due to Covid. However, the accounting treatment that Waverley was required to apply meant that this had to be treated as a usable reserve, which it was not in the

strictest terms, and that was why Annex Six was entitled General Fund Reserves within the scope of the Medium-Term Financial Plan.

The Vice Chairman also asked whether the Council's arrangement with the London Borough of Sutton to act as the Council's insurance broker and reinsurer for a certain part of its risk, was under annual review or was the Council tied into this arrangement for some number of years. The Committee was advised that they were contracted to them for five years, but it was under constant review and the Council's Insurance Officer acted as the interface with Sutton. It was noted that Waverley had not received many claims since it transferred to Sutton. The arrangement was felt to provide value for money as it was significantly less money than was paid to Zurich. Officers were not anticipating a big increase in the cost of insurance.

It was noted that car parking remained Waverley's biggest single income item. Some of the Committee felt that Waverley should be making the car parking experience as convenient as possible for users with measures such as ANPR as the Council had not increased charges for a few years, then implemented a sharp increase. Officers felt that the issue wasn't to make car parks as convenient as possible but to make them as safe as possible because of the condition that they'd fallen into. Waverley had not been able to afford to maintain car parks properly which had resulted in some serious health and safety issues with trip hazards and potholes. It was proposed to put aside £250,000 to bring them up to a safe standard. It was noted the Council was restricted in its use of ANPR. Unlike colleagues in the private sector who were able to use ANPR to track drivers, the Council could only use ANPR to track vehicles and therefore if ANPR was used in any of its car parks, the Council would have to install barriers.

It was stated that Waverley's main climate change issues were leisure centres and housing. Waverley had had a great deal of success with grants in the order of £900,000. Councillors asked when they would see the nine hundred thousand coming through the accounts. Officers said it was not all in one year but spread over many years. It was non-HRA and for the General Fund. It didn't form part of the budget for approval. Officers thought it would be helpful if they presented a memorandum to the budget about what was going on in terms of grants particularly around climate change and they could do that through their quarterly reporting to O&S. It was noted that the Executive had discussed having a table of any grant income received from other sources to clarify what the income was and how it was distributed.

RESOLVED

The Committee **ENDORSED** recommendations #1-7 to the Executive in para 3.1. The Committee further **RECOMMENDED** that the Executive explore investments in the Council's car parks to increase the income they generate.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to add scrutiny of the value-for-money of the Council's insurance reserve and agreement with the London Borough of Sutton on this matter to the work programme.

The Committee **REQUESTED** that the planning fees and green waste charges set out in the committee papers be checked to ensure they were correct.

21 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUSINESS PLAN BUDGET PAPER 2022-23
(Agenda item 8)

It was stated that the housing revenue account was a new addition to the Committee's remit. The item was introduced by the Head of Housing Operations. Officers were looking to resolve the challenges that the housing service was currently facing but it was also a budget that looked to the long term. Officers had a housing revenue account 30-year business plan and they were in a period where they were paying the interest. A few years ago the Council had four years of rent reduction. Officers were assuming they were going to have a rent rise with above inflation which would have significant impact on the business plan and in addition to that the Covid pandemic resulted in lost income. The Council continued to have contractual issues where staff focus was on dealing with the contract issues rather than improving services and bringing efficiencies. Additional pressures had arisen from inflation and the decarbonisation agenda. Eight hundred properties had been built before 1945, and therefore it would be challenging to bring these properties up to the desired standard. There were other challenges with new building standards, especially around health and safety, and making the senior living schemes safe would involve significant expenditure over the next couple of years.

The report recognised that because of the changing environment the Council needed to do a strategic review. On the rent rise, the report put forward the argument that the Council's tenants had generally managed to cope with the last year's rent rise but some individuals had struggled. Therefore, a hardship fund was proposed to help those people. He stated that the rent increase needed to be seen in context of the 30-year plan and consider the effect the rent rise had on future rent streams. The 4.1% increase would enable the Council to deliver services and it equated to £1.61 per week average across all the Council's tenancies. The Landlord Services Advisory Board and the Tenants Panel had been consulted on the rent rise and they understood the need for it but wanted to ensure that the additional money was invested in Waverley Homes and the building of new homes and that the Council delivered value for money.

Councillor Seaborne spoke on this item as Chairman of the former Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He sought clarification on the accuracy of the figures in Annex Three and Four and asked that they be corrected as appropriate prior to Council consideration.

Councillor Seaborne expressed disappointment that the forecast out-turns for 2021 and 2022 were not available. They were shown the out-turns but not the original budget figures. He felt that this would enable members to make a judgment on the council's recent performance and ability to deliver a capital programme. The 2021/22 anticipated out-turn for the HRA development capital programme was £2.4 million whilst the budget approved in February 21 was for £18.3 million so there was a large underspend. It was acknowledged that this had been influenced by the Covid pandemic. He also noted that there had been planning issues and he asked whether these factors had been taken into account when budgeting for the next four

years and if so whether they had been mitigated against to ensure a reasonable budget for the following year.

Councillor Seaborne stated that £6.7 million had been allocated over the next three years for purchasing new builds from developers, which would yield around 20 houses. He sought clarification on what provision had been made to decarbonise those properties.

The Head of Housing Delivery and Communities advised that the numbers in the report would be checked.

Annex Four was a complete restatement of the schedule that Councillors had seen in previous years, to give a whole life picture of the schemes in progress over the next four years and that was showing through with the commitment of £32 million. Last year's budget only included one year of the new build programme. Officers needed to indicate not just what they would be spending but what they might need to carry the schemes forward. He stated that Covid had an impact in terms of capacity to deliver the core program and responsive repairs. It had been possible to access void properties but not occupied properties during lockdown, so this had affected the budget for 21/22.

Officers acknowledged the inflationary pressure in respect of the build costs for the schemes currently in progress. Asset advisors Montagu Evans had been engaged to carry out a review of the schemes in progress to understand the potential liabilities so that they could make some informed decisions on how best to complete them even if it meant a longer time frame. It was noted that delaying also had risks.

It was stated that Waverley were letting homes at the energy standard EPC D but the majority were already at C. The Committee asked whether they wanted to get to standard A for all the Council's houses by 2030, as in order to do so two houses would need to be converted per day. It was further noted that the Government's own targets for EPC were C by 2030 and EPC A for 2050.

The Committee felt the rent rise was quite steep given all the other pressures on tenants.

RESOLVED

The Committee **NOTED** recommendations #1-9 to the Executive in para 3.1 and felt they should set up a working group of the two Scrutiny committees.

22 CAPITAL STRATEGY (Agenda item 9)

The Head of Finance and Property presented the item which set out a proposed Treasury Management Strategy for dealing with banking the Council's money, market investments and its borrowing policy; and the policy which governed its treasury management activity. The Capital Strategy was an overarching governance document which set out how the Council governed its capital spend. The Asset Investment Strategy was a much more detailed governance document in respect of how Waverley dealt with asset investment.

The Government had carried out a full-scale review based on its concerns around local authorities' foreign asset investment. The National Audit Office had looked into a number of authorities surrounding Waverley. The National Audit Office went into a period of consultation on the Strategy Management Code and the Capital Code or effectively prudential code for capital. They concluded the revision of both of those codes in late December 2021. In February 2021 the Council carried forward its existing Capital and Property Investment Strategies and the Treasury Management Strategy with updated indicators pending the outcome of the long-term review. Therefore, the three documents contained in the report were brand new. The Council was not able to do anything primarily for yield and the Government would not lend the Council money for that purpose. The Government stated that local authorities must focus their investment on service delivery i.e. strategic functions such as housing regeneration schemes, market failure areas where there was employment at stake and refinancing of existing positions. It was noted that the treasury management investment was now a corporate matter which had to be complied with.

Cranleigh Leisure Centre was in the core programme and had been considered by the Council recently. This was a £20 -22 million scheme which split over two years in terms of cash flow. There were some mixed-use developments in each of those years totalling just short of £20 million. The Burys Project was the other key project costing around £30 million, which was £15 million a year for two years. There was a question around whether the Council was allowed to invest in Cranleigh Leisure Centre if that would generate income. It was explained that the Council was restricted in terms of speculative income. It was able to invest in schemes which generated income as long as it was service related and a leisure centre met this criteria.

Councillors sought clarification that the second recommendation to Council was not open ended and would come back to Council for consideration each year. Officers advised that if the Council was minded to keep the risk element of the proposal under review, then an annual review would be appropriate.

It was stated that the HRA accounts would still see the interest cost attributed to their debt.

With regards to the recommendation in para 3.1.1, the Committee **RECOMMENDED** the approval of the 5-year Capital Strategy for 2022/2027, incorporating the Treasury Management Strategy, Prudential Indicators and Asset Investment Strategy by Full Council.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** that the proposed delegation in para 3.1.2 be subject to annual reapproval by Full Council.

The Committee **THANKED** the officers in the Treasury Management team for their underappreciated work on frequently technically challenging tasks.

23 SERVICE PLANS 2022-25 (Agenda item 10)

The Committee received service plans for Business Transformation, Finance and Property and Policy and Governance, each presented by the relevant Head of Service.

The service plans were similar to those proposed last year however, officers would highlight any areas of major change and the key areas of focus going forward.

The Head of Business Transformation stated that the main changes were around the new post- Covid working environment which had not yet reached a “new normal” due to the Omicron variant. Office redesign, booking systems and marketing space on the second floor of the Burys were other items his service had been working on.

Cyber activity was a critical issue and therefore the Council was investing in ways to prevent it happening. The work around channel shift also presented a significant risk.

Business transformation reviews were underway and there had been focus on recruitment in engineering and in other technical areas and re-advertisement of roles was becoming more frequent.

Progress was measured through individual’s appraisals and through the quarterly performance monitoring.

The Head of Finance and Property advised that a transformation project in the revenues and benefits service was nearly complete. Part of the process was implementing a self-service portal on the Civica software that was used to manage both of those services workloads which was important for business transformation. All key governance controls around reporting and data management had been consolidated into one team. The Council currently had an arrangement with Reigate and Banstead in respect of debt recovery and this function would be coming back in-house in April 2022. The current Adelante system would be replaced with Civica pay over the next financial year which would bring new functionality and cost reduction.

The Head of Policy and Governance stated that there were three key changes from the previous year's plan, firstly the reference in the previous year's plan that related to a general discussion across Surrey about local government structures had been replaced in the current plan with a more specific objective related to the Guildford - Waverley collaboration. Secondly the current plan continued to focus on customer service and performance improvement and finally the plan reflected the increased importance of promoting staff and counsellor well-being. Business as usual functions such as the provision of legal advice, committee administration, HR support, change management, employee relations, internal and external communications and maintaining the electoral register would continue. The Service had also supported the Guildford-Waverley collaboration focusing on the inter authority agreement in the coming year. The service had also supported the Where Work Happens project looking at how managers lead in a hybrid environment, how performance is managed in a hybrid environment and how to maintain a team spirit. He further noted that the constitution review would continue to take place.

There was further discussion of Councillors not wanting to go paperless.

RESOLVED

The Committee **THANKED** officers for producing and presenting extensive service plans.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED** the following clause was appended to the text of action with the Reference Number SP22/25 BT5.6: “whilst also respecting the reasonable wishes of those members who prefer to discharge their responsibilities using paper copies of agendas provided by Waverley Borough Council”.

24 ANNUAL COMPLAINTS INFORMATION (Agenda item 11)

The Corporate Complaints Officer introduced her annual report which provided a summary of the complaints that had been received in the previous year, performance in responding to those and lessons learned where appropriate. The report covered the number of complaints closed at each level and the percentages for each service. 64% of all complaints in 2020-21 were closed at level one compared with 75% the previous year. Housing Operations received the highest number of complaints in total with 106, however that was a slight decrease from the previous year. The largest number of complaints concerning housing operations were to do with the responsive repair service and property maintenance.

The Council aimed to respond to level one complaints within 10 working days and level two complaints within 15 working days. 84% of all complaints were closed within target time scales in 2020-21 and there was still some work to do to improve performance in that area.

In 2021, 68 of complaints were not upheld, 10 were partly upheld and 22 were upheld.

The Council followed the guidance given by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. This would often result in an apology being issued and in a small number of cases financial compensation would be paid.

The most important part of dealing with complaints was to look at where things had gone wrong in the way services had been delivered and take swift action to put those right.

Some of the Committee thought that the reduction in complaints closed at level 1 in 2021 compared with the previous year represented a drop in performance. The Corporate Complaints Officer stated that it depended on the service in question. They had received more planning complaints, which would progress to level two more than any other service areas, partly because it was an expression of concern that the Council had failed to take the complainant's point of view into account concerning a particular planning application. She stated that most local authorities had a high volume of planning complaints.

The Council had moved to using a more sophisticated database. When a level two complaint was closed, any actions to be taken were raised with the appropriate head of service.

It was noted that some of the issues being experienced with Housing Operations arose from problems with contractors and many sectors were finding it difficult to recruit skilled people.

RESOLVED

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

25 OMBUDSMAN REPORT (Agenda item 12)

The Corporate Complaints Manager presented the annual report setting out the complaints that had been made about Council services to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsmen in 2021. An annual report from the Local Government Ombudsman had been received, setting out feedback on complaints that had been received. The report also contained the Ombudsman's annual letter as an annex. She noted that the Ombudsman had increasingly taken a more selective approach in that and they only investigated complaints in depth where they felt that there was some good evidence that there had been injustice to the complainant. For the last four years the numbers had been reasonably stable. Part two of the report concerned complaints about Waverley's landlord and leasehold services and those were looked at by the Housing Ombudsman's Service. She stated that in 2021 the Housing Ombudsman closed investigations in four complaints and in each case, they were ordered by the housing ombudsman to pay compensation.

The Committee was concerned that the letter had been sent in July and two committees had passed since then. The Committee requested that if the usual agreement was for the Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the report, then it should be reported to the first available committee after the letter becomes available, which would normally be the summer meeting.

RESOLVED

The Committee **RESOLVED** to scrutinise the Ombudsman's Report at the first Committee meeting after it becomes available.

26 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 13)

On the recommendation of the Chairman, the Committee **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 was 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 (to be specified at the meeting) namely:

Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

The live streaming was then switched off for the Committee to go into Exempt session.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.55 pm

Chairman