

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - POLICY - 23 NOVEMBER 2021

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

Present

Cllr Stephen Mulliner (Chairman)	Cllr Chris Howard
Cllr Joan Heagin (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Roger Blishen	Cllr John Neale
Cllr Jerome Davidson	Cllr Peter Nicholson
Cllr George Hesse	Cllr George Wilson

Also Present

Cllr Peter Clark, Cllr Paul Follows

1 ELECTION OF THE CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 1)

The Committee agreed to the election of Councillor Stephen Mulliner as Chairman and Councillor Joan Heagin as Vice Chairman.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 2)

There were no apologies or substitutions.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3)

There were none.

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

There were none.

5 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5)

Questions were received from Councillor Brian Edmonds about whether the pensions funding deficit was under additional pressure as a result of long Covid leading to early retirements, and whether Leisure Centre Covid losses were recovered from Waverley's Business Interruption Insurance. The questions themselves and the written responses from Strategic Director Graeme Clark and Head of Finance and Property Peter Vickers were circulated to the Committee and published as an agenda supplement on the Council's website.

6 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 6)

The Committee agreed to move this agenda item to after item 9 on business transformation so that they had a better idea of the work which the Committee needed to do.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the format of the Work Programme documents had changed from the previous scrutiny committees. There was now a split between recommendations made to politicians and officers. The Chairman stated that he would like to see Business Transformation as a standing item on the Work Programme. He also asked the Committee to email the Scrutiny Officer over the following three weeks with what items they would like to see on the work programme.

7 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q2 (Agenda item 7)

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the performance information was for quarter two which related to 1st July to 30th September 2021. The areas within the Committee's remit were Corporate Dashboard – HR and Financial Aspects, Business Transformation, Finance and Property and Policy and Governance.

The Head of Business Transformation highlighted the fact that in the last quarter the big project was Where Work Happens changes within the building. Negotiations were continuing with a couple of potential tenants to lease the second floor of the building. There had been no additional costs above the established budgets for the team to accomplish this work.

The Customer Services Team were set up in October 2020 and worked together in the Council building again for the first time during quarter 2 rather than working from home. In that twelve month period there was a staff turnover of half the team. Some of those who left went on to work elsewhere in the Council.

Radware software was installed to deal with aggressive bots attacking the Planning portal and the situation was now a lot quieter.

There had been further meetings with partners Surrey County Council and the Environment Agency regarding drainage and flooding across the Borough. All high risk areas were identified. They were Cranleigh, Elsted and Alfold. There were also localised spots in Farnham and discussions were being had with Surrey County Council. Some of the work was being led by the Housing team. Strategic Director Annie Righton offered to provide a written update to Cllr Hesse regarding Mead Lane, Farnham. They were currently awaiting legal advice about the site.

There were questions about when would the IT situation improve. The Head of Business Transformation said they were considering moving into a paid relationship with Horizon who provided Planning software. There was a question about the Citrix migration and when the situation would settle down. The Committee hoped to see greater improvements soon. It was confirmed that the Citrix migration was now completed. There was a slight under estimation of the service capacity needed. Two new servers should be operational in a couple of weeks.

There was a further question around the new Building Control operating model. The Head of Business Transformation said the Building Control Review was complete but savings had not yet been realised.

The Vice Chairman asked when she could view the Customer Service Strategy and the Head of Business Transformation said it was currently available in draft form. A

lot of the work on transforming Customer Services was actually done in advance of the Strategy being written and signed off.

The Head of Finance and Property provided an update on the areas within his remit. He said that the collection of Council Tax and Business rates was under pressure as a result of the pandemic. The team were working on boosting their recovery process. The businesses under pressure were in the hospitality and retail sectors and had become liable for business rates again in at the end of June 2021 and they had been under pressure due to the lockdowns. The service were working with those businesses. The Chairman noted that for quarter 2 in 2020-21 the collection figure was 48.4% and asked whether businesses who were eligible for 100% relief had been left out of the figures and it was confirmed that they had

Councillors asked how much money was lost to Waverley through the non-collection of business rates. The Head of Finance and Property said that Waverley got 1.85 million of the 36 million collected as other funds went to the Government, Surrey County Council and others. If the figure fell below 1.85 million it was topped up by the Government so Waverley did not actually lose out. The Head of Finance and Property also reported that the budget was coping at present with the pressures on it although Leisure Centre income was not back to pre-pandemic levels and the same with car parking.

The Chairman asked that in future rather than there being a table which reported the approved budget figure and variance, they would like the variance column relabelled to report the forecast outturn. He also requested that the figures be broken down to show what the Council was doing with the money it retained rather than showing money it collected which went to other parties.

The Head of Policy and Governance reported on the performance of the areas within his remit. He explained that it included Legal Services and Land Charges, Democratic Services and Business Support, Electoral Services, Corporate Policy including customer complaints, communications and human resources.

In addition to the normal work of the service, in quarter 2 there had been the Chiddingfold Neighbourhood Plan Referendum, implementation of a new corporate complaints database, supporting cross party working groups, the boundary review, work surrounding the appointment of a joint Chief Executive with Guildford Borough Council plus various governance changes directed by Full Council.

He reported that the turnaround time for the processing of land charges within 10 days remained off target. He stated that he had reported on the reasons to the former Value for Money and Customer Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He reported that performance as at the date of the meeting was back under 10 days although this had not been the case during quarter 2. The Committee asked for their continued concern on Land Charges to be recorded. The Head of Policy and Governance said that the backlog had now been tackled.

Performance targets were also not being met on responding to complaints within timescale. He reported that most complex complaints related to environment, property and planning. A new database system had been implemented to help tackle complaints and track them more efficiently.

It was noted that staff turnover was higher than the previous year and the Chairman asked whether this was a result of the pandemic or the Guildford collaboration. The Head of Policy and Governance reported that fewer people moved during the pandemic and they were starting to move again now. The Chairman asked what the staffing grade was of staff who were leaving and the Head of Policy and Governance said he would provide written information. He also stated that Waverley's staff turnover was not dissimilar to other authorities.

8 CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020-25 - YEAR 1 PROGRESS REPORT (Agenda item 8)

The Leader of the Council introduced this agenda item. He stated that the Corporate Strategy 2020 – 25 was adopted in October 2020. The vision was that Waverley would be a Borough which was environmentally, economically and financially sustainable with healthy, inclusive communities and housing available for all who need it. He said the economic and societal impacts of Covid 19 were still unfolding. He had encouraged each executive member to take ownership of their sections of the report which they had drafted themselves with officers assisting. They had identified their own action points and priorities.

There was a question as to why the Council had only just adopted a financial management code from CIPFA and the Head of Finance and Property said that it was a new code.

There was a discussion around the timeframe for the business transformation savings. A lot of the work has been done but the savings still to be realised.

There was further discussion around the value of partnerships with Enterprise EM3. The Leader stated that they injected expertise.

There was also a question on the Council's Carbon Neutrality Action Plan and the retrofitting of the Council's housing stock. The Leader said the main areas where the Council could make a difference were the insulation of its housing stock and the rebuilding of its leisure centres. He stated the Services O&S Committee would be looking at Cranleigh Leisure Centre. There was going to be a pilot programme soon for retrofitting a selection of Waverley's housing stock. It was stated that much of the funding for this work would come from from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The Council was not eligible for any Government grants for this work. They would need to think about the balance between new builds and refurbishment of existing properties. The Tree Strategy was discussed although it was suggested that especially in view of diseased and dying trees, this would have far less of an effect on carbon reduction.

There was further discussion about going paperless for meetings and the Vice Chairman suggested that training would be needed to navigate large documents online and to tab items. The Leader stated that the Head of Business Transformation was putting in a capital bid for £30,000 to look at new technologies around Council papers and distribution as it was currently costing over £20,000 just to post committee papers to Members at home without factoring in the printing and paper costs.

The Vice Chairman commented that health and safety of those working predominantly from home needed to be looked at as part of the Where Work Happens Project. The Leader stated that it was being looked at.

9 BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (Agenda item 9)

This agenda item was introduced by the Portfolio Holder for Business Transformation and IT Councillor Peter Clark. He described the new customer service centre as a way of saving money whilst also improving customer experience. 85% of calls were now dealt with at the first point of contact. Savings of £170,000 had been delivered so far with approximately £130,000 still to come. There had been 93,000 calls in a ten month period to September 2021. The challenge remained to reduce the abandonment rate for calls. This could be helped by reducing the number of calls received about missed bin collections. The collaboration with Guildford Borough Council would help to identify more opportunities to make savings. Guildford does not have a Business Transformation team in place.

The Head of Business Transformation stated that they were on target to meet the original target of a million pounds worth of savings. A large amount of the savings would come from the changes to staff travel which would save around £300,000. Most of the other savings were from a reduced head count by automating services. There had been no compulsory redundancies to date. There was a print, posting and scanning review underway.

The Chairman requested a new version of the supplied table of figures be provided to show more clearly the savings made. The Head of Business Transformation said there had already been more saved than was forecast which is why it was shown like that on the table. The Chairman asked to have the tables larger on two sheets of paper and two columns for each heading showing the original forecast and what had actually been achieved. The Business Transformation Manager also explained that where figures were not shown it was because plans were in place so it was in the forecast but had not yet been realised so could not be shown in the savings realised until it had come out of the budget. A £100,000 saving was expected by the end of the year.

10 BUDGET 2022/23 AND MTFs (Agenda item 10)

This item was led by the Head of Finance and Property. A budget timetable would be available by the end of the week of the meeting to inform Members of the process up until the budget cycle in February. Service Managers were reviewing the detail and the management team would look at the detail of that. Executive would see it just before Christmas. There would be an opportunity for a detailed all Members briefing in early January. An informal briefing for the Committee before Christmas was also offered.

The Committee stated they would like to see the savings by department. So it would be possible to see the scale of savings in individual departments. They also wished to review the balance sheets.

11 CIL - GOVERNANCE & EXPENDITURE (Agenda item 11)

The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) led on this agenda item. She stated that there was currently an ongoing CIL bidding cycle. The Chairman stated that he was a member of the CIL advisory board. The Vice Chairman wanted to try to invite bids which would deliver infrastructure such as schools, roads and medical venues. The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) said that when the CIL was set up, it had been expected that Surrey County Council would be one of their main bidders and there had been many discussions with the healthcare professionals. There had not been great engagement from Surrey County Council so far. Officers were hampered by only being able to assess those bids which were offered to them. She asked that Councillors put pressure on the relevant organisations to engage with the process. She also said that feedback had indicated that some bidders were taking more time to put together their bids and there had only been one cycle so far and they were in discussion about some projects. An infrastructure project could sometimes be justified as supporting development even if there were not houses there where there was, for example, a through road. The Leader suggested that sometimes bids were not put in by the County Council because they did not have the time or the resources to do so. He suggested there needed to be a discussion with Surrey County Council about how to assist them with putting in bids which everyone knew were needed. The Committee **RESOLVED** to ask the Leader to write to them and invite them for discussions. He knew which individuals to approach. This was proposed by Councillor Martin and seconded by Councillor Heagin. They also wished to talk with the CCG.

Some of the Committee wanted to see more information about why certain bids were turned down. The Principal Planning Officer (Policy) stated that the scoring criteria were publicly available on the Council's website. There was also a comment that there needed to be some way of stopping developers from dodging paying CIL by putting in several bids under the limit.

12 PROPERTY INVESTMENT ADVISORY BOARD ACTIVITY UPDATE REPORT
(Agenda item 12)

This agenda item was led by the Head of Finance and Property. He said the Property Investment Advisory Board had had no activity since the last quarter. The main activity had been over the past couple of months revising the Property Investment Strategy. This would include a reflection of housing investment needs.

13 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 9.14 pm

Chairman