

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - RESOURCES - 10
JULY 2023

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

Present

Cllr Peter Martin (Chair)	Cllr Jerome Davidson
Cllr Andrew Laughton (Vice Chair)	Cllr Andy MacLeod
Cllr Lauren Atkins	Cllr Terry Weldon
Cllr Zoe Barker-Lomax	Cllr Michaela Wicks
Cllr Janet Crowe	

Apologies

Cllr Peter Nicholson

Also Present

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Nicholson.

25 MINUTES (Agenda item 2)

The Committee confirmed and agreed to the minutes of the meeting held on 20th March 2023.

26 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3)

No Declarations of Interests were received.

27 WORKFORCE PROFILE 2022/23 (Agenda item 7)

Jon Formby, Interim HR Services Manager, addressed the Committee. He explained the main scope of the report; including protected characteristics data i.e. age profile, ethnicity profile, disability, profile, gender profile as well as turnover figures, sickness absence statistics and long-term and short-term statistics.

Councillors queried the staff sickness rates being 60% higher than the national average; notably that the statistics of mental health absences were 6 times higher than the national average. Jon Formby explained that this was somewhat impacted by a number of long-term cases in some of the service areas however it was an area of concern that the Council was looking to address through health and wellbeing initiatives. The Health and Safety Executive Survey and Joint Health and Wellbeing Survey across WBC and GBC looked at identifying areas for improvement; significantly workload and bullying (data suggested that this was coming to officers through members of the public most predominantly seen in planning and housing services). He noted that the Council was looking to improve

guidance to members of the public as well as offering training on staff resilience and managing workload. In terms of benchmarking and comparing to other Councils, Jon noted that the Health and Safety Executive Survey allowed broad benchmarking against other councils, in which WBC performed in the upper quartile in terms of managing health and wellbeing however it did not allow for more specific comparisons. Robin Taylor further confirmed that item 9.2.2 of the Q4 Corporate Performance Report included commentary on staff sickness and staff turnover in comparison to other Surrey District and Borough Councils. **Cllr Barker-Lomax suggested that more work is done to gain clearer benchmarking figures in relation to the Workforce Profile.**

Members requested more information on vacancy rates by department. Jon Formby agreed to share this information with the Committee at a later date

Jon Formby addressed the Committee and noted that one key area of concern was the age profile of the workforce and noted that the Council were looking at initiatives and succession planning to increase our younger workforce as well as retaining them. Cllr Wicks raised a point around agile working, referenced in the report and questioned its effect on staff retention and morale. She indicated that this may particularly be effecting younger staff adapting to the office environment and more challenging aspects of the job due to lack of supervision. **Cllr Barker-Lomax requested specific data on the number of staff working from home by department and which measures are in place to ensure representation is in place to ensure staff are available in person on a daily basis. Members were keen to receive a separate report based on agile working data and the impacts on staff performance, retention and morale. John Formby and Robin Taylor agreed to these recommendations.**

Cllrs Davidson and Wicks noted a lack of declarations in the staff ethnicity and religion data and queried the validity of this data. Jon Formby noted that this was a difficult area but the Council offers staff an opportunity to declare this information at the beginning of employment as well as annual surveys, but efforts will continue. Cllr Davidson further queried the use of AI to fill gaps in the workforce. Cllr Follows addressed the Committee and informed them that he recently attended a presentation by a provider that uses low level AI in areas such as planning checks and flags issues that will need officer input. This may be something the Council will consider in the future. He explained that this could remedy areas where staff recruitment and retention were persistently struggling such as planning. The Committee would like to further look at the potential for AI in delivering Council services; this can be added to the work programme.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to officers in relation to the report:

- **Committee to receive more information on vacancy rates**
- **Committee to receive information on the effects of the collaboration on staff morale**

- **Committee to receive report on agile working and it's impact on staff and staff retention rates**
- **Committee to receive clearer benchmarking figures**

28 PRESENTATIONS FROM HEADS OF SERVICE (Agenda item 9)

The Executive Heads of Services addressed the Committee.

Abi Lewis, Executive Head of Planning and Regeneration Policy, sent apologies and agreed to circulate a presentation to the Committee Members at a later date.

The Chair noted that the Service Areas that fall into the remit of the Committee were outlined in the Q4 Performance report, as follows;

- **Assets and Property** – page 15
- **Communications and Customer Service** – page 19
- **Finance** – page 23
- **Housing Services** – page 27
- **Legal and Democratic Services** – page 36
- **Organisational Development** – page 39
- **Regeneration and Planning Policy** – page 42
(Corporate capital projects and housing delivery)

29 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4 (Agenda item 8)

The Committee discussed concerns around Housing and Complaints and resolved to make the following recommendations:

- Committee to set up sub-group to look at issues within Housing and rise in complaints linked to performance issues with responsive repairs, etc. Group to focus on repairs information, red KPIs and complaints. Remit of sub-group yet to be established in consultations with the Executive Head of Housing Services, Andrew Smith. Cllrs Lauren Atkins, Terry Weldon and Michaela Wicks put themselves forward to join the sub-group.
- The Committee commented on the need for benchmarking – a comparison with how WBC is doing nationally or in Surrey i.e. return in investment, staff turnover figures, etc. Cllr Follows noted DLUHC letter from Michael Gove introducing number of metrics to ensure Councils can be directly compared with each other across Local Authority boundaries. DLUHC issued an additional set of metrics. Letters to be shared with Committee.
- Rosie Plaistow to provide Committee with yearly figure on General fund summary table (pg.71), balanced to figures seen in the Q3 Performance Report.
- Committee to receive progress update report on the Ockford Ridge deep retrofit refurbishment

30 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 6)

The Committee agreed to bring the following items to the work programme, with dates to be decided;

- Collaboration and business transformation update; to include Services Review and Service Challenge process
- Follow up on the Workforce Profile including; agile working, impact of collaboration on staff, vacancy rates by department, benchmarking and AI potential.
- Asset Investment Strategy update/separate offline session on the Asset Investment Strategy
- Economic Development Strategy update
- Separate offline session on MTFP and budget strategy to be set up in early September with Rosie Plaistow and Cllr Merryweather. O&S Resources Members to gain deeper understanding on how to scrutinise the budget.
- Ockford Ridge deep retrofit refurbishment progress update
- Report/update on Godalming and Farnham BID projects referenced on Executive Forward Programme
- Committee to look at and discuss DLUHC request for metrics and comparative data
- Committee to consider remit and terms of reference of the proposed Housing scrutiny sub-group.

31 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 10)

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.20 pm

Chairman