

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING
- 19 SEPTEMBER 2017

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

Present

Cllr John Ward (Chairman)	Cllr Tony Gordon-Smith
Cllr Pat Frost (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Denise Le Gal
Cllr Carole Cockburn	Cllr Richard Seaborne
Cllr Patricia Ellis	Cllr Liz Townsend
Cllr Michael Goodridge	

Co-opted Members

Miss Brenda Greenslade	Mr Adrian Waller
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Also Present

Councillor Carole King

12. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 2.)

Apologies for absence were received from Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations.

Cllr Carole King, Portfolio Holder for Housing was present at the meeting.

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

15. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4.)

There were no questions from members of the public.

16. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT - QUARTER 1 2017/18 (APRIL - JUNE 2017) (Agenda item 5.)

Annalisa Howson, Service Improvement Manager, introduced the Performance Management Report on key performance indicators for the first quarter of 2017/18 (April – June 2017).

The Housing Service had performed well in the first quarter of 2017/18, with only three indicators missing their target.

The void re-let performance target of 20 working days continued to be challenging. The average for the quarter was 22 days, which showed an improvement over the previous two quarters, and 33 out of 63 homes had been re-let within the target time which demonstrated that this was a realistic target to work towards. The Committee was advised that the performance for August had been 16 days.

As usual, a number of factors had combined to result in delays in re-letting homes, some of which impacted on the time taken to bring the property up to re-let standard, and some which delayed the sign-up of new tenants once the property had been passed back to the Council. There had been a number of refusals by applicants on some homes, and action had been taken against applicants who refused three offers by temporarily suspending their ability to bid on properties. A number of properties were restricted to older tenants which limited the number of applicants able to bid. Given the demand for council housing, a review of age-restricted housing would be undertaken to see if it was possible to relax these restrictions.

Unusually, the rent collection performance had missed its target in the first quarter of 2017/18. The rent collection team had an excellent record for rent collection, and this quarter's performance was expected to be a one-off occurrence resulting from the high number of tenants in credit on their rent accounts and who had adjusted their rent payments accordingly.

Whilst the customer perception of responsive repairs jobs 'fixed first time' had dipped slightly in the first quarter, there had not been any impact on the overall satisfaction with the service which was at 92%. Officers continued to work with the contractor to improve performance through accurate diagnosis of repairs and appropriately prepared operatives.

Overall, the number of complaints received by the Housing Service had shown a significant drop in the first quarter, driven in particular by a fall in the number of complaints about the responsive repairs service.

The Committee was pleased to see the overall good performance, and particularly the high number of compliments received by the service, recognising that people were generally more inclined to complain than to praise.

The Committee noted that tenants' perceptions of whether a repair had been 'fixed first time' was very subjective and could depend on their understanding of the fault and what was required to put it right. A lot of work had been done to map the customer journey from initial phone call to report a problem through to resolution, and this had informed the way in which customer satisfaction data was collected. Follow-up calls were made to customers who were particularly dissatisfied to establish exactly what the cause of this had been; analysis was also carried out by trades to see if there were any patterns evident.

Cllr Seaborne referred to the Waverley Scrutiny Group's report on the voids process that had been presented to the Committee at the meeting in July, and the findings in relation to the time taken at either end of the repair process for Waverley to interface with Mears: there seemed to be some scope to reduce the time between Waverley receiving the keys from the vacating tenant and handing them on to

Mears to carry out works; and between Waverley receiving the keys back from Mears and the property being available to the HomeChoice team. He asked if it would be possible to present the performance data in a way that showed how the re-let time was split between the contractor and Waverley?

Cllr Seaborne also advised the Committee that he had discussed the voids process with the Head of Housing after the July meeting, and had been very impressed with the level of analysis and understanding of the work flows. Some variability in performance month to month was acceptable, and could be affected by the type of properties that had become vacant, assuming that that larger properties with gardens would take longer to bring up to re-let standard than a small flat.

The Committee was pleased to see the overall good performance in Housing, and the notable drop in the number of complaints. The Committee suggested that the presentation of the void re-let indicator (H2) be revised to show the split of time between the contractor and Waverley during the re-let period, and also an indication of the size of the properties re-let, as this could impact on the time taken to complete the works. The Committee noted that the Housing Service has a systematic, data-driven approach that covers the entire customer journey to understand customer satisfaction.

17. IT SYSTEMS IN THE HOUSING SERVICE (Agenda item 6.)

Annalisa Howson introduced the agenda report that explained the range of IT systems used in Housing, and outlined IT development plans within the Housing Service.

The Committee had raised some concerns at their meeting in July during the discussion of the Waverley Scrutiny Group's report on void re-lets, regarding the effectiveness of IT systems, and in particular the interfaces between key systems including those of the council's contractors.

The Housing Service managed a huge amount of data of different types, relating to the properties the council owned, the tenants and leaseholders, and the interactions and transactions between the council and tenants, leaseholders and Housing applicants. To do this, Housing had a number of specialist IT systems which were used in conjunction with various Waverley corporate systems.

The Committee was reassured that there was an effective interface between Waverley's Orchard system and Mears' MCM as a way of sharing information on responsive repairs and voids works. However, it did rely on care being taken with data input. The Committee was also pleased to learn that there was a Housing IT development work plan that was reviewed regularly and ensured that all development requests were assessed and prioritised against the objectives of reducing manual handling of data, maximising the use of Orchard as the central IT system for Housing, and improving tenant satisfaction.

Cllr Frost expressed concern about the length of time it was taking to implement the interface between Orchard and Agresso. This had been promised for a long time and needed to be prioritised to streamline processes and enable more efficient working. Peter Vickers, Head of Finance, advised that the interface was part of a

wider upgrade of Agresso and was now in testing; it would go live in the next month or so.

The Committee noted that the Digital Platform would be the next IT development priority. This was a corporate project that would improve the range of online, self-service functions for those residents who preferred to interact with the Council remotely. Housing was piloting the digital platform, which in the first phase would allow tenants to view their rent account balance and details. In the long term it was planned for residents to access other council services via the digital platform.

Cllr Le Gal asked how the Housing Service was preparing for the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations in 2018, which would require organisations to have clear policies and procedures, supported by IT systems, to ensure the security of personal data.

Damian Roberts, Strategic Director of Frontline Services agreed that this was a major issue for the whole Council, not just Housing, and therefore a corporate GDPR Project Group had been established, led by Graeme Clark, Strategic Director for Finance & Resources. Whilst a lot of work was required to ensure that Waverley was ready for GDPR, Waverley was part of the Public Services Network, the government's high-performance network, and had implemented various measures to achieve PSN accreditation. Data-sharing with other government agencies was covered by specific data-sharing protocols. The most familiar example of data-sharing was Housing Benefits data with the Department of Work and Pensions.

The Committee was reassured that IT development in Housing was being actively managed and planned in order to maintain a culture of continuous improvement. However, there were some residual concerns whether the needs of Housing were prioritised and adequately resourced by the corporate IT team, and the Committee asked for the IT Work Programme to be circulated to them, so they could assess if this was a matter that should be escalated.

18. SHELTERED HOUSING SERVICE AND HOUSING RELATED SUPPORT (Agenda item 7.)

Andrew Smith, Head of Strategic Housing and Delivery, provided a verbal update to the Committee on the Surrey County Council's (SCC) proposals to decommission Housing Related Support funding, including funding for services to older people, in order to achieve savings in the Adult Social Care budget, and the implications for Waverley services.

The Committee noted that following an 8-week consultation with providers (June-August 2017) the SCC Cabinet would be considering recommendations on the proposals at its meeting on 26 September 2017. The agenda for this meeting had just been published, which set out the detail of the final recommendations:

1. *SCC to no longer provide funding for Housing Related Support for people with learning, physical and sensory disabilities **and services for older people**; and*
2. *SCC to continue to fund Housing Related Support for the socially excluded – those with mental health issues, **those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness**, ex-offenders and the gypsy and traveller community.*

Assuming that the recommendations were agreed by the SCC Cabinet on 26 September, Andrew Smith explained the implications for Waverley services:

- Housing Related Support provided funding for Waverley to employ a manager at each of the 8 Sheltered Housing schemes. The managers supported tenants by ensuring a safe and secure environment including estate management, offering advice and information, and helping to access community services such as day and health care.
- It was not permitted to use the Housing Revenue Account (rents) to pay for this service.
- Residents would be able to request an assessment from Adult Social Care of their care and support needs to see if they qualify for support under the Care Act eligibility criteria. It was not expected that many Waverley tenants would qualify for this.
- Work was underway to model the finances of the sheltered housing schemes and develop options to secure a sustainable service going forward. However, there was a likelihood of redundancies arising from the reduction in funding.

Waverley also received Housing Related Support in relation to provision of homelessness services to social excluded residents. Whilst the funding for this service would be significantly reduced, it would not be cut entirely. The funding was for accommodation-based support and floating support. Funding for accommodation-based support helped to fund 2 beds in the Woking night-shelter for Waverley clients with complex needs. Floating support was currently provided through the Riverside (a 'third sector' organisation) in Guildford, but consideration was being given to other ways of providing a service for Waverley residents.

The Chairman invited Adrian Waller and Brenda Greenslade from the Tenants' Panel to brief the Committee on the work that they had done to support sheltered housing tenants during the consultation.

Adrian advised that the Tenants' Panel had attended the SCC consultation event at each of the sheltered housing schemes, and had produced a comprehensive report (*attached to these minutes*) that highlighted the concerns of tenants and their families. The managers provided an important service to vulnerable older tenants who, with that low level of support, were able to maintain a level of independent living that would otherwise be at risk and could lead to more residents requiring intervention from Adult Social Care. The uncertainty around the future of the sheltered service was causing a great deal of worry for residents, which extended to other services such as Careline.

The Tenants' Panel had issued a press release about the impact of the cuts in funding which had received good coverage, and Brenda had submitted a public question to the SCC Cabinet and would be attending the Cabinet meeting. It had been disappointing that no Surrey County Councillors had attended any of the consultation events in Waverley, and they had been very grateful to Cllr King for her presence which had meant a lot to tenants.

The Committee commended the Tenants' Panel for their work in supporting tenants, and the excellent report that summarised the concerns. Tenants had been very grateful to the Tenants' Panel and Cllr King for taking up their cause. The

Committee agreed that the cuts to funding for services to older people was short-sighted and was likely to result in a poorer quality of life for older people in sheltered housing schemes. It was very sad, however, that this might not make them sufficiently vulnerable to meet the criteria for individual support from Adult Social Care.

Damian Roberts echoed the concerns of the Committee and Tenants' Panel: sheltered housing schemes provided an important half-way house between an older person living fully independently in their own home and having to move to a care home. They addressed the key issue of social isolation, and the knowledge that a manager was available to provide support if necessary increased self-confidence. It was hugely disappointing that the decision had been financially driven, and whilst there was a collective will in Waverley to continue to offer the option of sheltered accommodation, there would have to be changes.

Cllr Frost asked that all tenants be given reassurance that Waverley's Careline service was not affected by these funding cuts. She also pointed out that the staffing of Sheltered Housing Schemes had already been reduced over the years in order to cut costs, and the managers were the last remaining on-site support. Cllr Frost agreed with the suggestion from Cllr Le Gal, that Waverley should engage with Surrey MPs to ensure that impact of the funding cuts was raised at the highest level of the Government.

Andrew Smith pointed out that the Government had been due to publish a green paper on the future funding of supported housing in the spring, and this was still awaited. If the Council was to write to MPs it would be a useful opportunity to lobby for some positive policy statements from the government on housing.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Executive that:

- Waverley thanks the Tenants' Panel for their work in supporting tenants in Sheltered Schemes during the SCC consultation;
- reassures tenants in the Sheltered Housing schemes that Careline is not affected and will continue; and,
- the Leader writes to all Surrey MPs, and the Prime Minister, and Minister for DCLG (Sajid Javid) to express grave concerns about the impact of cuts by Surrey County Council in Housing Related Support funding, especially for older people, and to press the government to bring forward the long-awaited Green Paper on the future funding of supported housing. The Committee recommended that the Leader include her letter to Surrey County Council, and the Tenants' Panel excellent report on the impact of the withdrawal of HRS for older people.

19. OCKFORD RIDGE - SITE VISIT FEEDBACK (Agenda item 8.)

The Chairman reported back on the site visit to Ockford Ridge that had taken place on 1 August. He had been joined by Cllrs Carol Cockburn, Patricia Ellis and Liz Townsend, and officers.

It had been a very informative visit, and Members had been very pleased to see the progress being made on Site D. Building the show homes had been a very good tactic – they had provided a taster of what was to come, and a clear demonstration of Waverley's commitment to the project.

A personal observation about the show homes had been about the huge roof space, that tenants were not allowed to use. This seemed to be a waste of space, and had prompted a discussion about the design standards that Waverley uses to guide its housing development work and whether these should be reviewed.

Cllr Cockburn noted that it was clear that officers had reflected on experiences so far of development management and community consultation, and had identified lessons that needed to be learned. It was quite hard to identify a suitable topic for the Committee to scrutinise that would lead to some useful and timely recommendations.

Whilst Cllr Frost recognised that there had been great improvements in the project management, she was keen for the Committee to play a role in monitoring the key elements of the project, for example the budgets and spend, slippage against timetable, risks, and issues. This was Waverley's biggest housing development project in many years, and there was a considerable reputational risk in relation to the council's ability to effectively project manage the scheme and complete on time and in budget.

The Committee agreed to add an Ockford Ridge progress summary to the work programme as a standing item, and to discuss a potential review of the Waverley design standards under the next agenda item.

20. REVIEW OF HOUSING DESIGN STANDARD (Agenda item 9.)

Louisa Blundell, Housing Development Manager, introduced the report which set out the background to the development in 2013 of the Council's design standards and specifications for new housing developments by the Council. The design standards took account of the Homes and Communities Agency Design and Quality Standards, the Housing Quality Indicators, the consultation by the Department of Communities and Local Government on Housing Standards, Waverley's Parking Standards, and feedback from residents on their new housing association homes. The standards were adopted in 2014.

The guidelines outlined the standards and specifications that the Council aspires to achieve when delivering its new homes and provides the starting point for all designs. However, they also indicate that a balance should be struck between meeting all standards and specifications and the wider housing objective, particularly where there are financial and practical constraints. All designs were assessed on a site-by-site basis and conflicting priorities addressed according the context of that particular development, including the needs of that area and the profile of future tenants. This ensured the best possible scheme could be delivered within financial and practical constraints.

Given that the Council now had a great deal more experience of housing development, it was timely to review the design standards; and the observation made about the 'waste' of roof space was a good example of the fresh perspective that Members could provide. The review had direct relevance to the Ockford Ridge project, as proposals for Site C would be brought forward in 2018, and the revised guidelines would inform the instructions to the architects for the detailed planning application.

The Committee agreed to undertake a review of Waverley's Housing Design & Standards Specification, to inform the planning application for Ockford Ridge Site C and other Waverley developments.

The Committee noted that the scope and timetable for the review would be prepared by Alex Sargeson in discussion with Louisa Blundell. The following Members were appointed to the Task & Finish Group to carry out the review: Cllrs Tony Gordon-Smith, Richard Seaborne, Liz Townsend, Patricia Ellis, and Adrian Waller (Tenants' Panel).

21. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 10.)

The Committee reviewed its forward work programme, and noted that the provisional agenda for November 2017 included:

- Homelessness Reduction
- Housing Strategy
- Private Sector Housing – a general overview and the Home Improvement Policy
- Update on the impact of SCC decommissioning of Housing Related Support – plans for services to socially excluded homeless and Sheltered Housing Schemes
- Ockford Ridge Regeneration programme – progress summary & highlights

The Committee noted that the Value for Money & Customer Service OS Committee had set up a Task & Finish Group to look at slippage in the capital monitoring programme, and had asked the Housing OS Committee to nominate a member to join the Group, in view of the extensive capital programme in the Housing Revenue Account. Cllr Richard Seaborne agreed to join this Task & Finish Group.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 8.20 pm

Chairman