

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 26  
FEBRUARY 2019

(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 Richard Seaborne  |
| Cllr Patricia Ellis            | Cllr Liz Townsend      |
| Cllr Paul Follows              |                        |

**Apologies**

Cllr Carole Cockburn and Cllr Michael Goodridge

16. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carole Cockburn and Michael Goodridge.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

A question was raised by James Remnant – Tenant and Secretary of Waverley Scrutiny Group as follows:

As the grounds maintenance contract is due for renewal this year, presently the contract is with Glendale, who has provided an indifferent service and following on from the Green Paper 'A new deal for social housing' and from the Council's own Scrutiny Review Council Housing: Pride or Prejudice where on pg. 30. "Poor maintenance of outside areas", similarly on pg. 39 "there seems to be less pride taken in how the properties and land around them are maintained" and in the recommendations pg. 43 where Estate appearance was highlighted; coupled with the paragraph on page 37 "Ensure that tenants have a voice"; what provision has been made to involve tenants in the tendering process, and if not shouldn't tenants be invited to comment upon the service as it stands and say what they would like to see in the tender document and express their expectations for this service?

Response from the Chairman:

The maintenance of the Housing Service's green spaces is included in the Council's grounds maintenance contract procured and managed by Waverley's Parks and

Countryside Service. Serious consideration was given for the Housing Service to let its own grounds maintenance contract but this was found not to be feasible. The Head of Housing Operations has ensured that tenants' comments and expectations have been taken into account in the development and drafting of the new grounds maintenance contract.

Tenants were given the opportunity to express their views in the STAR (Satisfaction) 2017 survey and at Summer Social Events held across the borough in August 2018.

In the STAR survey only 67% of tenants were satisfied with the grounds maintenance service. All parties acknowledge this level of satisfaction is too low and that tenants believe the appearance of their estate is important.

Increasing tenants' satisfaction and meeting expectations are central to the tender process that is currently underway for the Grounds Maintenance Contract. Tenant insights have guided the development of a range of Customer Satisfaction KPIs for Housing land. An annual incentive payment of up to £20,000 could be paid to the contractor should they attain the required performance improvement. Housing Tenant satisfaction – to be measured annually – will contribute up to 35% of the performance criteria on which this bonus will be based.

The procurement process will be completed by the end of May, with the new contract commencing 1 November 2019.

20. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were none.

21. REPAIRS AND MAINTENANCE PROCUREMENT PROJECT OUTCOMES  
(Agenda item 6.)

The Committee received a report on the outcome of the project to procure a range of repairs and maintenance contracts for April 2019. Vicky Fordam-Lewis MPS Housing Limited's Managing Director was present at the meeting and was introduced by Annalisa Howson, Service Improvement Manager. Vicky provided a presentation, introducing the team and the responsive repairs and voids contract promises. The slides are attached to these minutes.

The Committee was reminded that the number of repairs and maintenance current contracts were due to end in spring 2019 or to be extended for a further seven years. Following a thorough procurement plan, the project had progressed well with all key elements completed in 2018. There had been a slight delay with the planned interview dates and with contract signing but due to the healthy mobilisation period within the procurement project plan there had been no adverse impact.

The Committee noted the procurement outcomes and the post project actions. This report which identified the successes of the project and lessons learnt including recommendations for future procurement projects.

It was noted that in November 2018 Mitie Group announced the agreement to sell its social housing business, including the Waverley Contract to Mears Group plc.

The Team met with Mitie and Mears to clarify the company structure and for confirmation of the commitment to the delivery of the Waverley contracts. It was confirmed that the external decoration service and Waverley's redecoration framework contract remained within the Mitie Group. MPS Housing Ltd would be separate from Mears Ltd the Councils current responsive repairs provider.

The Committee was advised that introductory meetings with all contractors had been held and mobilisation had commenced. A second windows and doors procurement project was planned for spring 2019. Mobilisation was in progress with joint teams developing processes and training. A pilot kitchen and bathroom replacement programme was due to commence shortly and a tenant drop in event to meet MPS was booked for 15 February and a tenant's newsletter to introduce the new contractors and services would be sent towards the end of March.

Councillor Patricia Ellis asked a question about one of the organisation's aims which was to reduce the amount of telephone contact by 5% and questioned whether this was make more use of contact via online forms. She was advised that 35% of the calls they received were in relation to upcoming appointments and that more effective communication through the web would reduce the need for these calls.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked about the breakdown of the new organisation and whether Mears staff, who were well trained and experienced in the area, would be retained. He was advised that they had a legal responsibility and most staff would be TUPE'd across and any new members of staff thoroughly trained from the start of employment.

Councillors Liz Townsend, Paul Follows and Pat Frost asked questions regarding the monitoring of customer satisfaction, when this would happen and if they shared data or had targets. The Committee was informed that they wanted to engage with customers and would carry out customer surveys both by staff and an independent external company during and following the service respectively. They wanted to get things right first time and if not, rectify any issues raised by customers at the earliest opportunity. Data was shared across branches and with clients as they wanted to be open and transparent.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked about the Windows and doors replacement programme and how long this would take and impact on the work programme. He was advised that they had only just recently carried a big programme of window replacement and that there was limited budget in the next year as it was not required. Councillor Liz Townsend asked whether tenants were kept informed of when they would expect their windows to be replaced, Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations advised that this was an area that they were looking into and that did need improving. They had just recruited a new asset manager and part of his role would be to manage this and improve customer service and engagement in this respect.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked a further question regarding staffing and whether there was enough technical staff for the service to run smoothly. Hugh Wagstaff responded that, this was a challenge for the Council, hindered capital works and they had gone out a number of times for recruitment of surveyors. They

continued to look into options but initially were looking to “grow our own” by developing current staff into the roles.

**The Committee resolved**

1. To thank the tenant volunteers for their time taken to complete evaluations and assessments;
2. To support the mobilisation of contracts; and
3. To request future post implementation progress reports on all contracts.

22. COUNCIL HOUSING: PRIDE OR PREJUDICE - TASK AND FINISH GROUP  
(Agenda item 7.)

Councillor Liz Townsend introduced the report to the Committee and started by saying it was a really collaborative piece of work by Members and Officers and thanked everyone involved in the Task Group. It really showed the benefits of scrutiny and this Group had worked very successfully.

The Committee was reminded that it had set up a Task and Finish Group in September 2018 following the publication on the governments Green Paper “A New Deal for Social housing”. The Group was set up to identify if there was any existing prejudice against social housing within the Borough and to understand how tenants viewed their homes in order to develop services to both prompted pride and tackle causes of any stigma. The report detailed the findings of the study, related them to the national social housing debate and listed recommendations made by the group.

The Committee found the report and its findings extremely interesting and informative. It was clear that there was some confusion over the role and purpose of social housing and it would be beneficial for a common definition to be adopted across the Council to avoid any misconceptions. It was noted that the demographics of respondents did not provide an accurate representation of residents in the Borough and that it would be beneficial to have more views from those under the age of 35 to address this balance. Members also found it interesting, albeit not surprised, that there was stigma against social housing because of poor design and maintenance, including outside spaces. They were assured that this was being addressed through the Council’s recently published Housing Design Standards and Affordable Housing SPD.

Councillor Paul Follows thanked Yasmine Makin and Annalisa Howson in particular for the work they had put into the Group. It was a great effort by all involved. The work had confirmed original thoughts that there was a stigma and brought to light other issues. It was interesting that the demographics of the Borough were not what he had thought and it was interesting that most thought that the threshold for eligibility for social housing was much different to what it was. The work also highlighted that the data source used had somewhat reduced since the introduction of GDPR and that this was something to consider in any future such surveys.

Councillor Patricia Ellis asked about the comments made in the report about the eligibility of people on the housing register and how a more positive message could be portrayed. Councillor Liz Townsend responded that the number of people on the waiting list had declined and Annalisa Howson went on to advise that the study found people didn’t ask to be on the register because they thought that there others in more need. They felt that social housing was a precious resource and shouldn’t

take a space even though they were eligible. Annalisa continued that they wanted to raise the profile of social housing and encourage people to apply because if they didn't have an idea of the number of people in need, they could not put together a business case for bigger developments with more social housing.

The Committee agreed that the report went some way to answer a number of important questions about stigma but was only the start of a complex subject that needed additional work to create a more comprehensive understanding of the causes of stigma and what could be done to tackle it.

### **The Committee resolved to**

1. Thank the Task and Finish Group and the Officers for all their hard work in producing the report.
2. Agreed that there should be a list of those Councillors involved on the Group added to the report; and
3. Endorse the recommendations contained within the report to the Executive.

### 23. HOUSING SERVICE PLAN 2019/22 (Agenda item 8.)

The Committee received the three-year service plans for April 2019-March 2022 for the service areas under the remit of this Committee which were

- Housing Operations; and
- Housing Strategy and Delivery

The Service Plans had been prepared by the Heads of Service in cooperation with their teams and Portfolio Holders to set out the service objectives for the coming three years in line with the Corporate Strategy 2018-2023 and the Medium Term Financial Plan 2019-2022. Nora Copping, Policy and Performance Officer, who introduced the report, advised that that in order to be more closely with the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, each service plan now covered the period up to 2022. They included business as usual outcomes and actions as well as service wide projects and cross cutting projects.

Councillor Richard Seaborne raised a number of points. He asked that the wording for objectives 4 on both plans be reworded to be clearer. He felt the date for 4.2 was incorrect and, as was being monitored should be 2022 and not 2020. Furthermore, there were a number of target dates for a year's time and it was felt that, if there were actions that arose from these, it would be better that they were achieved sooner so could be factored into the next budget process considerations. One last comment was on objective 5.1 which referred to effective mobilisation but it didn't say what they were going to do to be effective and perhaps needed the wording looked at.

**Resolved** that the service plans for 2019-2022 be recommended to the Executive for approval.

### 24. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE (Agenda item 9.)

Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Strategy and Delivery, presented a report providing an update on the progress since January 2018 on delivery of well designed, sustainable and energy efficient homes for the council to meet the housing need of

Waverley residents. Members were reminded that the provision of affordable housing was central to community well-being. It was consistent with the Council's corporate strategy people goals for 2018-2023 by investing in the Council's homes to ensure that they were pleasant and safe, maximising the supply of affordable housing by developing new council homes and implementing the Housing Strategy 2018-2023.

The report listed the completed schemes, those on-site, those pre-development and those in the pipeline.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

25. DRAFT AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT CONSULTATION (Agenda item 10.)

The Committee received a report seeking Member consideration of the draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The document set out the Council's proposed approach for securing planning obligations in connection with policies contained in Local Plan Part 1 and made a recommendation to committee to approve for consultation between 6 May 2019 and 17 June 2019.

The Committee noted that the affordable housing SPD would be a significant material consideration in the determination of planning applications and appeals and it would support transparent and efficient planning processes and will ensure consistent and fair decision making.

The Affordable Housing SPD had been developed to provide clarity to developers, housing providers, Development Management Officers, Stakeholders and local residents regarding the basis on which affordable housing would be sought, the forms it would take and the specifications for it. Following consultation and any comments received, it was anticipated to be adopted, subject to Council approval, in October 2019.

**Resolved**

1. To note the scope and themes of the draft affordable housing SPD; and
2. Approve the draft affordable housing SPD for consultation.

26.a HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 (Agenda item 11.a)

The Committee received a summary of the Housing Service performance over the third quarter of the financial year. The report detailed the team's performance against the indicators that fell within the remit of the Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members had the opportunity to comment and scrutinise the presented performance data. In addition, Members could identify future committee reporting requirements regarding performance management or area for scrutiny review.

The Committee was informed that the service performed well over the last quarter with only 2 indicators not meeting target. These were for the average relet time for normal voids and the overall satisfaction with responsive repairs performance.

The Committee was reminded that it had requested additional details to monitor the percentage of affordable homes agreed on planning applications. On reviewing the

detail it was identified that six of the eight housing planning applications achieved 30% or above affordable housing. Two schemes with a lower percentage were agreed due to specific circumstances and this involved Manor House in Godalming due to vacant building credit and Churt Place, Churt, because of an independent assessment of the applicant's viability appraisal confirmed that the only viable option for delivery of affordable housing would be two shared equity homes to be delivered on the application site. This additional information should provide Members with assurance of the percentage of affordable housing for each planning application and forecasts for future delivery.

The Committee was pleased that the housing service was generally performing well meeting targets on rent collection, gas safety and homelessness. The team continued to strive to meet key performance targets for relets and the overall satisfaction with responsive repairs.

**Resolved** that the report be noted with no comments to forward to the Portfolio Holder or areas to add to the scrutiny programme.

26.b CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q3 (Agenda item 11.b)

The Committee received the corporate performance report which provided an analysis of the Council's performance over the last quarter.

The report covered all service areas and included a prelude from the Chief Executive on performance to date. Tom Horwood, the Chief Executive, announced that the performance during this quarter had been particularly good with most performance indicators and service actions on track. The Service chapters provided commentary and detail focusing on those areas of the Council's business that required intervention to bring them back on track.

In relation to KPI H2 (average number of working days taken to re-let 'normal void' property) Members raised concern that this was above target (lower is better) by 1 and this was the only indicator of them all which was off target. Annalisa Howson explained that the re-let performance was only one day over target due to a number of homes in exceptionally poor condition and Mears' sub-contractor's performance. Members were also concerned about KPI H7 (responsive repairs: How would you rate the overall service you have received (higher outturn is better) and it was 89% against a target of 93%. Members were assured that the fall in overall satisfaction with the repairs service was being closely monitored with the introduction of new initiatives to capture and respond early to any dissatisfaction.

In relation to Housing Strategy and Delivery, performance had been going well and were on target. The number of households in temporary accommodation was very low. Work on Site A at Ockford Ridge would be beginning in the spring and preliminary work was underway on the next two phases of refurbishment.

The Committee was pleased to note that all service plan actions were progressing on target for completion. At the end of quarter, 3 out of 7 actions would have already been completed. It was noted that there were only two complaints over the last quarter which were all successfully dealt with at level one within the 10 working day timescale.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked officers to check on the figures in relation to consistency of data in relation to affordable housing as there appeared to be discrepancies between the two performance reports.

**Resolved** that the report be noted.

27. GARAGE PROJECT - FURTHER DETAIL - UPTAKE OF GARAGES BY LOCATION (Agenda item 12.)

The Committee was reminded that at its last meeting, Members had requested further information and detail on the locations of the garages across the borough including hotspots, let rates for each block, upgrade works past and future and details of waiting lists and demand. The Committee also requested feedback on both the garage grounds maintenance plan and the solar light pilot study.

The Committee was advised that there had been a steady decline in garage occupancy over the last few years. Efforts had been made to maximise revenue by letting vacant garages. Of 682 garages, 473 garages (70%) were occupied and of these, 343 (73%) were licenced to private residents while just 130 (27%) were licenced to the Council's tenants. The Committee heard that despite there being 209 vacant garages there were still 189 applicants on the waiting list. The reason for this was that the garages were not in the areas that were suitable for the applicants. Places in high demand were in Farnham and Godalming with Alfold being a low demand area. This will be continue to be monitored.

In relation to the grounds maintenance programme, site specific information was being compiled and data collated and passed to the Housing Asset Team to produce a maintenance programme which could be shared with the Committee.

The Solar light pilot study had provided mixed feedback which was mainly positive. An agreement had been reached to carry out another pilot study, trialling a more powerful light product (something that had been raised as a concern in the previous study) which would overcome the issue of the dark winter months, since it was during this time of the year that the lights were most required.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked about what would happen to those garage sites which were vacant and had been for a while and if there were any plans for them. Hugh Wagstaff advised that they were using the data for the garage strategy and would be looking at whether there were other uses, such as new housing, and ensuring those that remained, were kept maintained.

Councillor Liz Townsend asked about vacant garages in Cranleigh as one in particular on Glebelands, there were 5 occupied, 7 vacant and 8 on the waiting list. Hugh Wagstaff advised that this could well be because the vacant garages needed maintenance or that they were not in the area that the customers wanted.

**The Committee resolved to**

1. Note the progress in garage lettings and revenue maximisation;
2. Note the distribution of garages across the borough including hotspots; and
3. Note that a garage block maintenance programme was to be developed by the Housing asset Team.



28. OUTCOMES OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WSG'S REPORT ON MUTUAL EXCHANGES AND DOWNSIZING TO SENIOR LIVING HOMES (Agenda item 13.)

The Committee was advised that the Waverley Scrutiny Group completed a review on the Mutual Exchange Policy and process, including reference to downsizing to senior living schemes and this was presented to Members at its last meeting. The Committee now received a report informing Members how the Housing Service Team had addressed the recommendations raised in the Scrutiny Group's report on mutual exchanges including a review of the Mutual Exchange Policy.

The comprehensive report had identified 20 recommendations and grouped them into three work streams:

- Communications
- Processes
- IT

Grouped together they made 13 recommendations of which they felt that 7 were particularly pertinent. And, since the report was published, officers were pleased to advise that all recommendations had been addressed and completed following the internal process, IT and communications review. Updates following the review had also been made to the Mutual Exchange Policy and had been made more customer focused. Officers were pleased that the work completed on the recommendations had resulted in a simplified process, update communications and reinvigoration of mutual exchanges.

Councillor Liz Townsend asked about the 563 people registered on the home swapping scheme, how long did that take to build up? She also asked about whether any checks were done to ensure tenants were not coerced into doing an exchange. Annalisa Howson advised that the register did build up over time and that they monitored it to check that they continued to be active in looking for exchanges. In terms of people being coerced into an exchange all housing and tenant officers were trained in safeguarding and this was something that they would look at with any mutual exchange with questions being asked.

Councillor Richard Seaborne asked about asbestos and whether tenants were informed of its presence in the property before the tenant moved in. Annalisa Howson assured Members that all tenants were advised and fully informed if there was asbestos in the property but they did try and resolve this before tenants took up residence.

**The Committee resolved to**

1. Support the updated Mutual Exchange Policy; and
2. Note the successful implementation of the 20 Waverley Scrutiny Group recommendations.

29. UPDATE REPORT - IMPLEMENTATION OF SENIOR LIVING SERVICE (Agenda item 14.)

The Committee received a report on the new Senior Living Service following its implementation in April 2018. Members were advised that since the funding was withdrawn from Surrey County Council, sheltered housing provision was changed to

Senior Living. This had meant a new model of delivery, providing older people with housing that promoted their independence and strived for excellent customer service.

The Committee noted that a review was undertaken six months after its implementation to ask tenants how they felt about the changes and if there were any concerns or positive reactions. This had brought mixed feelings but generally the implementation of the new service had gone well and tenants were happy. However, there were some reports of missing the care and support element of the service that was funded by Surrey CC. Other suggestions were to produce a Senior Living brochure and these would be open day events organised to target local tenants who may wish to down size. Community Officers would also continue to work with tenants to promote community engagement.

**The Committee resolved to**

1. Note the progress and the outcome of the review;
2. Support Senior Living Schemes in the promotion of services and wider community engagement; and
3. Request a progress report in 12 month on development and outcomes of the service.

30. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 15.)

The Committee received its work programme, outlining particular items to be received over the next Council Year, progress with those that had been completed and included the Executive Forward Programme. Members were asked if there was anything that they wished to add to the programme as a potential review or scrutiny item in the next Council Year.

It was noted that this was the Committees last meeting and those new and returning in the new Council Year would receive a comprehensive induction at the first meeting. This would also involve discussing items to add to the work programme. Councillor Liz Townsend requested that those actions arising from the Pride or Prejudice Task and Finish Group be added to the work programme.

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 8.44 pm**

**Chairman**