

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - VALUE FOR MONEY &
CUSTOMER SERVICE - 24 JUNE 2019

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

Present

Cllr Roger Blishen
Cllr Jerome Davidson
Cllr Joan Heagin
Cllr George Hesse
Cllr Jerry Hyman

Cllr Peter Martin
Cllr Stephen Mulliner
Cllr Peter Nicholson
Cllr Julia Potts

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 1.)

Cllr Julia Potts was confirmed as Chairman of the Value for Money and Customer Service O&S for the Council year 2019/20.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIRMAN (Agenda item 2.)

Cllr Joan Heagin was confirmed as Vice Chairman of the Value for Money and Customer Service O&S Committee for the Council year 2019/20.

3. MINUTES (Agenda item 3.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 18 February and the Special Meeting held on 11 March 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTES (Agenda item 4.)

There were no apologies for absence.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no declarations of interests in connection with items on the agenda.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 6.)

There were none.

7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 7.)

There were none.

8. SERVICE PRESENTATIONS (Agenda item 8.)

The Committee received presentations from the Heads of Service on the areas falling within the remit of the Value for Money and Customer Service O&S Committee.

Business Transformation

David Allum, Head of Business Transformation, outlined the responsibilities and priorities for this Service Area. He advised the Committee that Business Transformation was a relatively new Service Area, the creation of which had been driven by the requirement to deliver key financial savings by 2022/23. The Business Transformation project comprised a number of work streams with corporate overview which would ensure that a joined-up approach was taken and that any project drift would be identified and prevented.

The Committee asked for details of when more information about each of the work streams would be available. David explained that the scoping phase for each project would be completed by the end of June, and the aim was to publish the Strategy document by the end of July.

Commercial Services

Kelvin Mills, Head of Commercial Services, informed the Committee that this Service Area had been charged with bringing a more commercial approach to the Council. A new Commercial Strategy was being developed and Kelvin would present a draft of this to the Committee at its next meeting in September. Building Control was the main Service which fell within the remit of the VfM and Customer Service O&S Committee; Kelvin advised that the aim for this team would be to increase its market share with the overall aim of becoming budget-neutral.

The Committee also received a presentation on Brightwells Yard. This redevelopment programme would be important for the Council's future income generation. Debbie Smith, Development Programme Manager, also circulated a brochure which included a timeline with key milestones for the project, including the opening of retail units in Spring 2021.

The Chairman, Cllr Potts, highlighted that this was a major scheme that would bring in income for the whole borough. She asked for more specific details of anticipated income, which Kelvin agreed to circulate after the meeting.

Members agreed that it would be useful to see this project as a standing item on the Committee's agendas, in order to monitor progress and make sure it stays on track. There was also a request for more detailed project milestones to be included in future updates.

Economic Development

Paul McKim, Head of Planning and Economic Development, provided the Committee with an overview of the business economy in Waverley. An Economic Development Strategy was already in place, and an action plan was being prepared to support this. Paul was planning to present this to the Committee at its meeting in November. The Economic Development team was also supporting the creation of four Business Improvement Districts, working closely with the local Chambers of Commerce.

The Committee was concerned to note an increase in the retail vacancy rates in town centres and queried what could be done to address this. Paul responded that

the team worked with local landlords to identify why properties were empty and to encourage them to bring these back into use. Catherine Knight, Economic Development Officer, added that generally the retail vacancy rates in the borough remained below the national average of 8.9%.

Cllr Hesse suggested that pay on exit car parking could be used to encourage shoppers to spend longer in town centres. Annie Righton, Strategic Director, explained that the Executive had just commissioned a Strategic Parking Review. This review would be carried out by expert consultants and would seek to deliver a healthy level car parking turnover. This matter would be considered further by the Environment O&S Committee in due course.

Finance and Property

Peter Vickers, Head of Finance and Property, advised the Committee of how this Service Area was responsible for ensuring robust financial management throughout the whole organisation by supporting both officers and Members with effective decision making. This Service Area was also responsible for managing the Council's commercial property portfolio and seeking to generate income through property acquisitions via the Property Investment Strategy. Peter agreed to circulate further details of service metrics, specifically relating to revenues and benefits, following the meeting.

Policy and Governance

Louise Norie, Corporate Policy Manager, presented an overview of the Policy and Governance Service. A new Communications and Engagement Strategy was being developed and would come forward in due course. This would see a more planned and targeted approach being taken to corporate communication. A new website would also be developed over the coming year, which would facilitate some aspects of the Customer Service Programme.

The Committee was concerned to note that the Local Land Charges service, which was one of the biggest income generating teams within Policy and Governance, would eventually transfer to the Land Registry and therefore this income stream would be lost. Cllr Mulliner queried whether a date for this transfer was known, however officers responded that a date had not yet been set.

The Chairman thanked the Heads of Service for their presentations, which provided very useful background for when the Committee came to consider its work programme later in the meeting.

9. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 4 2018/19 AND ANNUAL OUTTURN (JANUARY - MARCH 2019) (Agenda item 9.)

Nora Copping, Policy and Performance Officer, introduced the Corporate Performance report to the Committee and gave a short presentation explaining the purpose and format of the report. She then took the Committee through the indicators falling within the Committee's remit, which generally showed very good performance for 2018/19.

The Committee was pleased to note a significant improvement for Quarter 4 in relation to two indicators regarding the time taken to pay invoices.

In regard to the percentage of Level 1 complaints responded to on time, which consistently fell below its ambitious target of 95%, the Committee heard that senior management had considered revising the target but had decided to keep it at 95%. Heads of Service would be reviewing the processes within their individual Service Areas to endeavour to meet the target in future.

Cllr Heagin asked whether any analysis of the types of complaints was carried out. Officers responded that work was done to identify lessons learnt coming out of complaints. Additionally, the Committee would receive an annual report on complaints handling at its November meeting.

Members made a further request for an analysis of planning appeals; this concern related to the cost implications of these appeals. It was suggested that a breakdown by major/minor applications be provided, as well as identifying where the decision had been a Committee overturn. Paul McKim agreed to present this information to the Joint Planning Committee, Environment O&S and VfM O&S.

The Committee thanked Nora for her report and noted the content.

10. BUDGET STRATEGY WORKING GROUP BRIEFING (Agenda item 10.)

Yasmine Makin, Scrutiny Officer, briefed the Committee on the Budget Strategy Working Group (BSWG), that had been established last year by the Value for Money and Customer Service O&S Committee. The BSWG had carried out extensive work over the last year and it was now proposed to reappoint the group, again with membership to come from all four O&S Committees.

Cllr Mulliner, who had chaired the BSWG last year, summarised the work streams that would be undertaken by the group over the coming year. Work stream 2, a participatory budgeting exercise was ready to be launched. The BSWG would then be focusing on work stream 3, working with Heads of Service to identify opportunities for improvements and efficiencies and to determine the deliverable savings that could be achieved from these.

It was clarified that the work of the BSWG related to the General Fund only as the Housing Revenue Account was governed by its own 30 year business plan.

Yasmine advised the Committee that there had been interest from other O&S Committees and several nominations for membership had already been received. Cllrs Mulliner, Hyman and Heagin also volunteered to join the group from the VfM O&S Committee.

The Committee agreed to reappoint the Budget Strategy Working Group, with membership to be confirmed once all four O&S Committees had met and agreed nominations for membership.

11. WORK PROGRAMMING (Agenda item 11.)

Yasmine Makin presented a briefing paper which set out matters that had previously been identified by the Committees as worthy of scrutiny. She invited the Committee to identify any items it may wish to add to its work programme for the

coming year, reminding Members that it was for the new Committee for decide on its own priorities for the year.

The Committee agreed that a review of value for money achieved through the Housing Service kitchens and bathrooms contract would be best carried out when the new contracts had had time to bed in and therefore suggested that this be added to the work programme for Spring 2020.

Members felt that it was very important that the Property Investment Strategy continued to be monitored. The Committee agreed to request an update from the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder on the Executive's approach to property investment going forward. It was also agreed that the Committee would continue to receive quarterly performance reports (including rental income and voids) on the properties acquired through the Property Investment Strategy.

Cllr Hyman recalled that the issue of fees and charges had been identified by a number of Members at budget-setting time and there had been a commitment to review this. Kelvin Mills advised that this would be addressed through the emerging Commercial Strategy which would come to the Committee at its next meeting.

The Committee also agreed that there was a need to monitor the performance of major projects, such as Brightwells, which were key for income generation across the borough, to ensure that they were properly delivered. It was agreed to add this as a standing item to future agendas.

12. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 12.)

Yasmine Makin introduced the Committee to the format of the work programme and invited Members to identify any further items it may wish to add.

Cllr Martin felt that the Committee should continue monitor the CIL Governance Arrangements, and it was agreed to request an update from the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder on the Executive's approach to CIL Governance going forward.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.06 pm

Chairman