

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 14 JANUARY  
2020

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING - <DATE>

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

**Present**

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)  
Cllr Christine Baker  
Cllr Patricia Ellis

Cllr Michael Goodridge  
Cllr Anna James  
Cllr Jacquie Keen

Cllr Jerry Hyman (Substitute)

**Co-opted Members**

Terry Daubney

Dennis Smith

**Apologies**

Cllr Peter Marriott, Cllr Richard Cole and Cllr Michaela Gray

**Also Present**

43. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 November 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and signed.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs P Marriott (VC), Richard Cole and Michaela Gray.

Cllr J Hyman attended as a substitute.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

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

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

There were no questions submitted by members of the public.

47. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions submitted by members.

48. SERVICE PLANS (Agenda item 6.)

Housing Operations

AH outlined the Housing Operations section of the Service Plan via a presentation (copy attached to minutes).

Members were informed of the five outcomes the service would work towards:

- financial robustness;
- meeting the needs of tenants;
- a professional and skilled workforce;
- an effective partner; and
- improved customer experience.

Issues raised by members:

- Members wished to know what objectives were rolling over from previous years and what were new.
  - HW advised most of the projects outlined in the SP were new.
- Efficiencies were being made in the general fund departments. Where are the efficiencies being made in the housing arena?
  - HW advised the VfM paper would outline the efficiencies being implemented.
  - Retendering of the maintenance contract was one such efficiency saving.
  - GC advised that housing is a Waverley function and that we are looking at efficiency plans in all areas corporately.
- The chair asked that in the 'impact' section of item 2 that 'Failure to reduce the carbon footprint be added.
- AH was asked to explain what 'sustainable tenancy' meant – she explained it meant helping tenants to maintain their tenancy to allow them to continue staying in the property.
- The chair asked officers to be mindful of the wording in these documents as some terminology may not be obvious in its meaning.
- HW advised that outcome 3 was rolled over from last year.
- Outcome 4 – members asked if this had not already started?
- Outcomes 3.5 and 3.6 there were no figures under resources.
  - AH advised that there was already a training budget so it was hoped there would be no additional funding required.
  - HW advised that Waverley have an apprentice levy from the government so this would be used for some of this funding.
- Members asked for some of the objectives to have measurable targets so there was tangible evidence whether they had been met or not.
  - HW advised that performance reports are provided to O&S quarterly to monitor this.
- Outcome 5 – HW advised that the new maintenance contract was an example of this and they would be monitoring its performance closely. The contractor would receive a bonus subject to the results of residents questionnaires.
- Members asked what 'One customer view' meant.
  - AH advised that the new customer management system would mean all areas of the business would work from one recording system

meaning an officer could have a holistic view of all contacts a customer had made with the council and should details change it would only have to be changed once instead of informing every single department.

- Members queried why the section on Blunden Court had financial resources as zero.
  - HW advised that this related to additional resources and as all resources had already been budgeted for there were no additional ones anticipated.
  - AH explained that all the procurement work had been done.
  - It was suggested that outcome 5 should be split out to Blunden Court as a separate outcome to the other areas.
- HO5.5 - The committee asked that 'Asbestos' be expanded to explain if it is testing or removal to make it clearer.
- HO5.8 – impact of not completing is not delivering on the carbon footprint reduction.

### Housing Delivery

AS outlined the Housing Delivery part of the service plan explaining that the communities objectives were not under the remit of this committee.

He explained there were five key areas with 14 objectives the service would work towards:

- Supporting community initiatives
- Delivering new affordable homes
- Preventing homelessness
- Regulating private landlords and
- Three cross cutting themes with Housing operations of meeting the needs of tenants, up skilling staff and improving the customer experience.

Issues raised by members:

- Although not in the committees remit AS was asked if there were plans to recruit more police officers for Waverley as Community Safety came under his remit. He explained there was a desire to increase numbers but a decision had not been made as yet. GC advised that we should find out by end of January how the money will be allocated.
- Outcome 7 should include major remodelling also.
- HDC7.8 – should have a start date of 01/04/2020 not 2019.
- HDC 7.4 – members asked about the sites at feasibility stage. AS advised that they could not be named in the public domain at present. It was suggested that the paragraph be reworded or removed.
- It was suggested that HDC7.4 be split down into 2 parts with the schemes at Chiddingfold, Churt and Godalming be a separate objective.
- HDC 7.7 – Members asked for clarification on the bidding of properties. AS was asked if we were bidding on properties already built? If so they were keen to know if there was a price difference between us purchasing and costs to build.

LB explained that as builds were tenure neutral and appraisals on the properties were carried out we certainly wouldn't be paying more.

- It was asked how often developers fail to deliver once a planning application is agreed. AS explained that we do press them and there are often arguments around viability. GC advised we could refuse future applications if they do.
- HDC 7.1 – The chair advised there seemed to be two objectives and asked for them to be split. He also asked for 'location' to be added into the sentence regarding affordable housing.
- HDC 7.5 – It was requested that 'Carbon Neutral' be changed to 'Low Carbon' as it is very difficult to have a carbon neutral home.
- HDC 7.6 – Members asked for the final sentence regarding refurbishment of phases 2 & 3 to be removed.
- HDC 7.7 – First sentence please add 'in target locations'
- Objective 8 – Members emphasised that the homelessness team were brilliant.
- HDC 9.3 – Members asked how easy it was to measure the carbon footprint of an Edwardian house. AS advised that this was a good topic to provide a presentation on.

**The Committee noted the Service plans and asks the Executive to note their comments.**

49. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET (Agenda item 7.)

The committee had received a briefing prior to the meeting on the HRA to better understand the complexities of the budget. LK introduced herself and advised she had redesigned the business plan and drawn up the HRA budget.

Members had queried in the briefing what efficiencies had been made by the Housing team. LK advised that there were a large amount of high value spends going out from the HRA and these were put up to tender so we were getting value for money on these contracts. Various efficiencies have been implemented over the area and contractors were regularly challenged over charge increases.

It had been raised that the rent increase proposed was above the rate of inflation and may be unaffordable to some. It was explained that due to the governments ruling that rents must decrease by 1% each year for the last 4 years this had caused a deficit which needed to be 'clawed' back.

Some members advised they had been frustrated by the rent decrease and that they felt a 2.7% rise was not unreasonable. The tenant panel members suggested that it would be helpful for tenants if they knew where this money was spent.

It was pointed out that the council was dedicated to providing 'affordable' housing and that if we put up rents at a faster rate than inflation then the rents wont be 'affordable'. It was also pointed out that as 2019-2020 was a 53 week year this meant that a 2.7% increase pa meant a 5% increase weekly as this year would be split over 52 weeks.

Officers were asked to explain why, when the budget sheet showed good reserves, we were looking to raise rents by so much. It was suggested we could make efficiencies by cutting out the 'Back funding Pension Cost' – GC advised this was

not possible as this was a statutory charge and not in our power to not pay. He explained it was a balancing act and that the balance sheet only showed 4 years. The reserves would eventually run out.

Members were advised that many tenants had built up a credit on their rent accounts by not reducing their payments over the 4 year period and thus it was felt the rent increase was affordable. It was also pointed out that if the rents had not reduced by 1% each year (over last 4 years) the rent was likely to have been similar if not more than the 2.7%.

The Chairman highlighted that in the draft capital program there were a lot of projects coming up but no indication of a budget to support this. AS advised that this was in the service plan discussed earlier in the meeting.

The chairman asked that paragraph 23 of the report be strengthened as the Climate Change Emergency needed more weight applying.

It was felt that paragraph 26 was a little one sided and there should be a cap to the level of delegation allowed. There should be a differentiation between a tactical need and a strategic need.

The committee then voted on the recommendations set out in the report.

Recommendation:

1. AGREED with a majority vote (1 vote against)
2. AGREED with a majority vote (1 abstention)
3. AGREED with a majority vote (1 abstention)
4. AGREED unanimously
5. NOTED
6. NOTED
7. AGREED subject to the addition of leaseholder charges being added to annexe 3 which had been omitted.
8. AGREED unanimously
9. AGREED unanimously
10. Officers to re-word this recommendation and send to Chairman to be circulated for agreement.

**At 9.25pm the committee were advised that procedure rules stated that committees should not proceed for more than 30 minutes over the allotted time slot without a vote being taken as to whether to conclude the agenda or reconvene at a later date. A vote was taken and it was AGREED to continue to the conclusion of the agenda.**

50. REVIEW OF ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT AUDIT (Agenda item 8.)

The committee received a report outlining the asbestos Internal Audit. It was highlighted that nine areas for improvement had been identified. Of the nine, five have been completed and four are in progress.

Circa 5000 asbestos management surveys had been carried out and there were approximately 80 properties outstanding. These were being risk assessed. Any high risk properties will have legal taken if they refuse access.

Members asked clarification on how/why there were 80 outstanding? HW advised that some had been refusals others for differing reasons. Officers were looking at ways to engage with these properties before going to legal action.

Officers were asked if these checks just related to properties or water pipes under highways also. It was clarified this was just properties Waverley BC owned.

**The report was NOTED.**

51. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 9.)

YM circulated copies of the current work programme. She advised that she had noted items raised during discussion this evening.

Members were asked to note Section A of the work programme. YM advised it was important to note the scrutiny tracker to ensure actions were carried out.

Items for the next meeting in March were currently identified as:

- Corporate Performance Report (Standing Item)
- Housing Development Update (Standing Item)
- Draft Climate Emergency Action Plan
- Mental Health and Housing

Members were advised that following the O&S training held it had been agreed that from the next meeting the work programme will be discussed at the beginning of the agenda rather than at the end. They were also asked to consider items raised through the Service Plans and suggest issue to potentially scrutinise.

Items suggested were:

- Scrutiny of the repairs contract
- ASB policy (due mid year)

It was also noted the executive forward programme had not been attached as had been agreed at a previous meeting.

52. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC (Agenda item 10.)

**Recommendation**

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 is 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 identified at the meeting).

At 21:41 the committee went into exempt session and the webcast was closed.

53. HOUSING RESPONSIVE REPAIRS AND VOIDS CONTRACT (Agenda item 11.)

The Committee considered the exempt report attached to the agenda.

54. ANY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN EXEMPT SESSION (Agenda item 12.)

**The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and concluded at 9.59 pm**

**Chairman**