

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - HOUSING - 6 JULY 2020
(VIRTUAL MEETING HELD VIA ZOOM)

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

Present

Cllr Richard Seaborne (Chairman)
Cllr Peter Marriott (Vice Chairman)
Cllr Christine Baker
Cllr Richard Cole

Cllr Patricia Ellis
Cllr Michael Goodridge
Cllr Anna James
Cllr Jacquie Keen

Terry Daubney (Co-optee- Tenants Panel)

Apologies

Dennis Smith

Also Present

Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman, Cllr Jerry Hyman, Cllr Paul Follows
Councillor Jerry Hyman,
Councillor Paul Follows and Councillor Anne-Marie Rosoman

1. MINUTES (Agenda item 1.)

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th March 2020 were confirmed as a correct record.

The Chairman asked that three items from the minutes be reviewed later in the meeting under agenda item 10 (the Committee's work programme):

- Item 59 – The request for an officer report on complaints.
- Item 62 – Working group to consider Allocations Policy to be set up in September once the committee had moved away from just business critical items.
- Item 63 – Outstanding request for update on Mental Health to be brought back for consideration.

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

Apologies for absence were received from Dennis Smith, Co-Optee Tenants' Panel. Since apologies had not been noted a week in advance of the meeting no substitutes were appointed.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3.)

Cllr Patricia Ellis advised she was the Chairperson for a Voluntary Organisation but felt this was non-pecuniary in relation to the items on the agenda.

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

There were no questions submitted from members of the public for this meeting.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (Agenda item 5.)

There were no questions submitted from Members for this meeting.

6. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q4 2019/20 (Agenda item 6.)

Housing Development

Andrew Smith, Head of Housing Delivery and Communities, outlined the areas of the report that he felt would be of interest to the Committee:

- Homelessness – report later in agenda.
- Housing Delivery – Site A Ockford Ridge, delivered only 3 weeks late despite the Covid-19 lockdown.
- 142 Affordable homes were delivered over the 2019/20 year.

It was suggested that the issue of viability should be included in the Draft Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, particularly as some developers may be struggling after Covid-19. The Committee were assured this was being considered.

The Committee asked what impact the pandemic had had on housing delivery this quarter and going forward. They were informed that at present there is no indication of any impact.

The Chairman asked Officers to indicate the level of grant needed to move a property from affordable rented to the social rented bracket and to explain what policy is supporting the decision when the Council decides to do that. Andrew Smith advised it depended on the size of the property but affordable rent was usually 80% of market and social rent could be 50% so that gave an idea of uplift required. The Committee was advised that the Council was hoping to set its own 'Waverley' rent based on conversations with the Town and Country Planning Association and hoped to be taking this through the Committee when formulated.

The Chairman asked for an update on the completion of the Key Housing Conditions Survey. Andrew Smith advised this had been quoted at a cost of £40k to complete so would be going to Management Board for funding and approval. The team was hoping to start the work in the New Year.

Housing Operations

Annalisa Howson, Housing Service Improvement Manager, outlined the areas of the report that she felt the Committee should note.

- New housing team launched, who attended the tenants panel open meeting.
- Launched the new responsive repairs contract.
- The Housing Customer Service Team were the star team over the lockdown mobilising to help tenants.
- New repairs contract had a small impact on re-let times. Despite this, and the lockdown, the contractors were scheduling appointments to catch up as soon as possible.

- There had been a slight reduction in the number of complaints in Q4. The Committee was advised that staff had been spoken to about improving targets.

The Committee asked if the interim contractor for housing maintenance was able to cope with the reduced demand as a result of COVID19 and were reassured that the contractor had furloughed some of their staff and managed their costs that way.

The Committee asked if the complaints performance was likely to have been impacted by COVID19, given that the last two weeks of the quarter were the first two weeks of lock down. Officers advised that such a short period was unlikely to have a significant effect and they did not have the data for Q1 2020/21 yet.

The Committee asked if kitchen and bathroom replacements had been suspended? They were advised they were suspended during lockdown but that the program was now being reviewed as lockdown is eased.

Officers were asked if there had been issues with the number of tenants paying the rent during lockdown? They were advised that the main issue was the mechanism for paying rather than affordability. Tenants had been advised regarding online banking etc. Those who were having affordability issues had been supported and advised accordingly.

The Committee CONGRATULATED the Housing Teams on their hard work over the lockdown period supporting tenants.

It was noted there was a £756K underspend on the accounts for repairs. Hugh Wagstaff, Head of Housing Operations, advised this was due to having a substantial budget allocated for the new contractor which was then not used due to the volume of work decreasing over lockdown.

Recommendations:

- The review of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document should consider climate change aspects and viability.
- The majority of Committee members endorse any future request for funding the Housing Stock Condition Survey, recognising the need to understand the level of issues so appropriate steps can be taken.

The Committee ENDORSED the request from the Housing Team for budget spend to understand what is needed to bring Waverley's homes up to a satisfactory level in relation to Carbon efficiency.

7. PROCUREMENT SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT (Agenda item 7.)

Councillor Peter Marriott presented the report from the Procurement Task and Finish Group. He explained that the group had been tasked with making recommendations regarding the procurement process for the Responsive Repairs Contract, for consideration by the Executive.

Discussions had been comprehensive with the members of the group, officers and FFT (specialist consultants). The group had looked at various models and had felt the way forward was to go with a single contractor.

The Head of Housing Operations suggested recommendation 3 should be less prescriptive and read as below.

9 recommendations had been set out in the report:

- I. Quality/Price split of 60/40 in the marking process for tenders.
- II. Customer Satisfaction to be measured throughout contract.
- III. Site visits to be ~~carried out~~ **considered** to gain a perspective of previous work completed. (*amendment to remove carried out and add considered*)
- IV. Average Price Approach to evaluate quotes
- V. Incentives and Penalties not to be included in the contract
- VI. Operatives to be tasked to raise safeguarding concerns when appropriate
- VII. Council to take initial call from tenant and job passed through to contractor (this could be reviewed once trust has been built)
- VIII. Customer satisfaction to be obtained through 3rd party to avoid bias.
- IX. Alternative delivery option to be laid out in contract. (in case we need to change our operating model)

The Committee AGREED the recommendations subject to alteration of recommendation 3 as laid out above.

8. HOMELESSNESS UPDATE (Agenda item 8.)

Michael Rivers, Housing Needs Manager, updated the Committee on the current status of Waverley's Homelessness.

At the beginning of March the Government became concerned at the level of rough sleepers in the country. At the beginning of lockdown all Local Authorities were required to provide accommodation to all homeless individuals regardless of their priority. This meant that the team needed to place a substantial number of people out of area.

The team had placed over 30 households into temporary accommodation over the last three months. Of those 20 had now gone into longer term accommodation.

The committee were advised that as the team previously had an excellent record for keeping people from being homeless, having to house 30 households had had a huge financial impact. There was a bigger challenge potentially coming up as private landlords had been prevented from evicting tenants over lockdown till end of August. But with many tenants getting into financial difficulty there was potential for private landlords to start evicting tenants in September.

Action: The Committee felt that homelessness was an ongoing issue that may have lasting effects for quite a while so requested updates at the next two meetings in September and November.

Action: The Committee RECOMMEND that requests by the Housing Team for any resources needed to keep on top of the homelessness situation are given serious consideration.

9. HRA RECOVERY PROJECT (Agenda item 9.)

Annalisa Howson outlined the HRA recovery project following the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.

The project had five objectives:

- I. Maximise rental income (support tenants in prioritising rent payments, signpost to benefits, agree repayment plans and consider legal action)
 - a. Nationally there had been a 10% increase in rent arrears
- II. Let homes (complete works on backlog of homes and recommence choice based lettings)
 - a. Lettings starting back up
 - b. 30 deaths and next-of-kin not being able to clear the homes due to lockdown has created a backlog of empty homes
- III. Reinstate responsive repairs and H&S/compliance works (inc Blunden Court works)
 - a. Nationally there was a backlog of 800,000 responsive repairs to complete but thanks to our tenants not reporting non urgent repairs our repairs have decreased.
 - b. Gas compliance checks had dropped slightly but this was mainly down to shielded tenants who did not want operatives in their homes. 84 homes currently had no certificate but most now had appointments booked.
- IV. Re/commence capital works programme (complete backlog of works, prioritise and programme on hold/ new requests)
 - a. Capital works were now restarting, with a focus on external works initially.
- V. Maintain development programme for new homes
 - a. 10 new homes handed over on Ockford Ridge.

The committee asked why Waverley did not use some of the empty homes for the homeless. It was explained we could only use them after health and safety works were carried out, but this did happen in some cases.

Concern was raised regarding the development programme as there was still uncertainty about the availability of materials.

The Committee ENDORSED the objectives set out and congratulated the team on their hard work over the pandemic.

10. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda item 10.)

Yasmine Makin, Scrutiny Officer, advised the committee that at present the focus would be on business-critical issues. Those items set out in the work programme previously were still there to be arranged as soon as practically possible, dependent on officer resources.

The request for an officer report on why the level of complaints regularly exceeded the target would be held for future consideration.

The Mental Health and Working Group for Allocations Scheme will be held on the work programme for the time being. Officers would keep abreast of the temporary governance arrangements and alter the programme when appropriate.

The committee agreed the Mental Health presentation was a high priority especially after the pandemic. Officers suggested the committee understand what they wanted to achieve with regard to this issue and it was suggested that an informal discussion take place between interested members to agree focus of discussion. It was also noted that Mental Health also came under the Community Wellbeing O&S remit so this could be a cross cutting item.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and concluded at 7.59 pm

Chairman