

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Esler (Chairman)

Cllr. Penny Cole (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Baker, Ball, Haslam, Horwood, Leaman, Manston, Robinson and Skinner

Cllr. Perry Cole was also present.

1. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 21 March 2023, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

There were none.

4. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

5. Introduction to Scrutiny

The Chief Officer, Customer and Resources gave a presentation on an introduction to Scrutiny. The presentation set out the model of Governance at the Council and summarised the main role and scope of the Scrutiny Committee as set out in part 5 of the Council's Constitution and the procedure rules for the operation of the function were set out in Appendix C.

Members asked questions of clarification which focused on Performance Indicators and Portfolio Holder attendance, call in and in-depth working groups.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6. West Kent Housing Association Chief Executive

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The Chairman welcomed Tracy Allison the Chief Executive of West Kent Housing to the meeting, who gave a presentation on the work of West Kent Housing within the District. The Chief Executive provided Members with some highlights of the services which included overall customer satisfaction at 4.3 out of 5, and complaints down from 2021. West Kent Housing were also reconfirmed as 'Gold', following their Investors in People assessment, and had also recently been a finalist at the UK Housing Awards and Winner at Kent Housing Group awards.

An active approach to damp and mould was undertaken from summer 2022 and a dedicated expert had been employed to help and support residents to live well in their homes. The Chief Executive of West Kent Housing further advised on the plans for investment in their current housing stock. A key piece of work would be looking at how the current homes could be modified to meet net zero.

An overview was given on some of the recent regeneration which had taken place. There was an ambition to build more new homes, but there were further challenges ahead including the ending of s106 monies, as 47% of affordable housing nationally came from this money. A lack of planning conditions requiring affordable homes, and the continued increase of land value. Challenges also included that as a sector there were not any guidelines for net zero or the standards for new decent homes legislation, access to skills to complete the works and upward pressure on prices.

In response to Member questions the Chief Executive advised that West Kent Housing worked closely with their communities through Tenancy support officers, annual health and safety checks such as gas safety, were also carried out in house as well, which enabled yearly contact with residents. During the pandemic it was a priority to contact those who had not been in contact, as well as actively checking that anyone over 70 had been contacted to make sure that they had necessary support. Close attention was given to those residents who did not want visitors. All staff who go into homes had received safeguarding training and often some residents would only trust the West Kent Housing Team and they would work with support services. There was also support for staff in suicide awareness.

In response to questions which were centred around customer satisfaction, Members were advised that in 2021 all residents were written to, asking them to complete a survey which was undertaken by an independent organisation for satisfaction. The survey covered a range of questions including benchmarks which were used across the sector. West Kent Housing also introduced their own rant and rave survey. This survey was sent to residents who had received a service within the month and asked for their rating. If a low rating was provided, a follow up call would take place to find out what went wrong and satisfaction levels had increased. This was carried out alongside a random survey for tenants on their thoughts of the service which all Local Authorities who hold housing stock carried out.

The Chief Executive advised that responsive repair measures had been in place for some time, and now included monitoring emergency repair times, urgent, and routine repairs within the agreed timeframe. It was unfortunate that they had had difficulties with a sub-contractor, and this had led to low satisfaction rates.

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Monitoring was also undertaken on sub-contractors and satisfaction rates for data and benchmarking. There was also a residents scrutiny panel who reviewed the key performance indicators.

In response to further questions, Members were informed that each month all unoccupied homes were reviewed, and an update was provided as to the process. Monitoring was undertaken on how long it takes for a property to be ready and how quickly it was re-let, as well as moving in satisfaction surveys undertaken. The Chief Executive advised that void days were measured once the property had been let. Recently there had been delays with some properties being let as there were specific requirements that had to be met, such as level of needs or older people's housing. The team were always looking at ways they could negotiate around some requirements based on the needs of individuals. A key project would be looking at the needs of older people.

This was the first Strategic Partnership agreement between the Council and West Kent Housing, and it was helpful for the sharing of priorities.

In response to funding questions, Members were advised that it was impossible to compete against commercial developers, but if site were purchased through West Kent Housing, then the Homes Grant would be available as it would be investigated for grant provision for shared ownership/social rent. The challenge would remain, at bidding costs, and therefore it was important to be looking at how to regenerate some of the existing sites and better use of the space available. The Business plan was regulated, and stress tested. There were challenges but there were steps and governance in place to help manage. Impact of the increases in costs were having an impact and priorities were looked at for replacing windows and doors over bathroom and kitchens.

The Committee expressed their thanks to The Chief Executive of West Kent Housing for her attendance.

7. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at the end of March 2023. Members were asked to consider 13 performance indicators which were performing at 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance.

Members discussed Performance Indicators LPI_DS Waste 002, 003, 004 and 005 and noted that the spike had been due to the change in the collection rounds, but were pleased to see that there was a continuing downward trend. Members further discussed recycling rates and whether Cabinet should be asked to look into this area in more detail in addition to potential future focus of the Scrutiny Committee.

In response to questions regarding audit actions fully implemented within agreed timescales (LPI_AUL1), Members were advised that the targets from internal audits were agreed with the Managers of the service area. If a deadline was missed, it

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would be referred to the Chief Officer, Finance & Resources as the responsible officer and he would have to be satisfied for the reason the deadline was missed. It was likely that if a target was missed there were a range of factors which influenced this, some of which may be external factors.

Members further debated a number of performance indicators, discussing the value of the indicator and whether it provided qualitative or quantitative data and the impact of the indicator. Particular focus was given to the LPI_CDH 05 and LPI_CS001 and LPI_CS 002.

Action: For Performance Indicator PLI_CDH 05 be considered for rewording to provide more specific qualitative data.

It was explained by the Chief Officer Customer & Resources that the performance Indicators were set with the relevant service areas and Managers, in conjunction with the Chief Officer and Members as appropriate. The indicators were part of a wider set of internal management data collection which included further quantitative data. When they were reviewed, the indicators would follow a process which included going to the relevant Portfolio Holder, this could be as often as necessary. Currently a review of a number of Performance Indicators was being undertaken.

Some are national indicators, which are set by Government, others were industry best practice and others were slightly more historic and council processes were changing and it was important to bring the monitoring up to date. It was important as Officers the indicators were challenging and were based on SMART Targets (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound).

Action: For the Scrutiny Committee, be updated on the process of reviewing Performance Indicators.

Resolved: That

- a) the report be noted; and
- b) Cabinet, be asked to look at the Performance Indicator for recycling rates within the District.

8. Establishment of In-depth Scrutiny Working Group

The Committee considered various areas for a new In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group to carry out a detailed evaluation. Members discussed the Council's response to Homelessness, waste and recycling collections. Following discussions on working groups a motion was put to vote whether to constitute a second working group to look at waste and recycling. The motion was put to the vote and it was lost.

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Debate continued on the Terms of Reference of the working group and membership.

Resolved: That

- a) an In-depth Scrutiny Working Group be set up consisting of Cllrs: Horwood (Chairman), Baker, Leaman, Manston and Scott (co-opted);
- b) The working group consider the challenges and available measures relating to homelessness prevention including the approach and suitability of out of district placements; and
- c) A report on the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group and any recommendations be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for consideration.

9. Work Plan

The work plan was discussed, and the following additions were agreed:

21 November 2023

- West Kent Police
- Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation
- Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment

9 January 2023

- Local Water companies
- Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener
- Portfolio Holder for People & Places

19 March 2023

- Everyone Active
- Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation
- Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.45 PM

CHAIRMAN