

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 8 January 2018 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

B A Smith (Chair)

M L Ayling, R G Burgess, C A Cheshire, I T Irvine, K L Jaggard, R A Lanzer, T Lunnon, A Pendlington, T Rana and K Sudan

Also in Attendance:

Councillors S J Joyce, P K Lamb, M A Stone and J Tarrant

Officers Present:

Natalie Brahma-Pearl	Chief Executive
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Hannah Martin	Performance, Policy and Project Officer (Housing)
Diana Maughan	Head of Housing Strategic and Planning Services
Chris Modder	Private Sector Housing Manager

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors T G Belben and L Vitler

1. Disclosures of Interest and Whipping Declarations

The following disclosures were made:

Councillor	Item and Minute	Type and Nature of Disclosure
Councillor C A Cheshire	Disabled Facilities Grant Policy (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Had previously been in receipt of a disabled facilities grant
Councillor R A Lanzer	Disabled Facilities Grant Policy (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Scrutiny Panel Update (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 27 November 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. The Chair welcomed Councillor Jaggard to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Disabled Facilities Grant Policy

The Commission considered report SHAPS/67 of the Head of Strategic Housing and Planning Services. The report sought approval to adopt a more flexible approach which has been developed in partnership with West Sussex County Council and all the West Sussex Districts and Boroughs in using the Better Care Funding to enable people to live more independently within their own home.

During the discussion, the following points were expressed:

- Clarity provided regarding the means tested approach derived by central government.
- By working in partnership with WSCC district and boroughs, a single approach has been developed to enable a maximum take-up of increased funding available to the benefit of local residents. Each authority can implement discretionary DFG assistance to supplement the existing mandatory regime.
- Confirmation that proposals would only be considered for people eligible for a grant following assessment by a WSCC Occupational Therapist.
- Clarity provided regarding extended warranty provision and mechanism for review.
- Confirmation that the application process was monitored to ensure satisfactory delivery.
- It was noted that there can be delays between residents contacting the Independent Living Team (Occupational Therapy Services) and the recommendation for disabled adaptations being received by the council. However, Private Sector Housing officers then progressed disabled facility grants as quickly as possible or as required by the applicant.
- Acknowledgement that the Better Care Fund was kept under review.
- Overall support for the mandatory and discretionary regime that helped people live well in their own homes.

RESOLVED

That the Commission supported the recommendations to the Cabinet.

5. Identifying and Monitoring HMO's in Crawley

The Commission considered report SHAP/68 of the Head of Strategic Housing and Planning Services. A scrutiny suggestion had previously been received and Commission Members had requested a report setting out the legislative requirements that the Council has to operate within with regards to Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and how the Council responds to these.

During the discussion with Members, the following points were expressed:

- Confirmation provided on the process for mandatory licensing.
- Acknowledgement that Article 4 Directions have been applied by other Local Planning Authorities, usually by applying a quantitative limit on the proportion of HMOs considered acceptable within an area. The ratio of HMO to family dwelling houses in any part of the borough had not exceeded the commonly used density of 10% within a 100m radius. However this was currently being monitored.

- Recognition that HMOs do not come into the category of micro-flats as the latter were self-contained units.
- It was noted that HMOs with two storeys or fewer may in future require a license.
- Acknowledgement that there was a need to strike a balance to meet a demand for HMOs within the town and housing need, whilst being able to make effective use of planning and housing powers to control and regulate new and existing provision.

RESOLVED

That the Commission welcomed the update and noted the legislation and guidance.

6. Housing Associations operating in Crawley

The Commission considered report SHAP/69 of the Head of Strategic Housing and Planning Services. A scrutiny suggestion had previously been received and Commission Members had requested a report following receipt.

The following comments were made:

- Recognition that the council owned and managed approximately three quarters of all social rented housing in the borough. The remainder was owned and managed by housing associations.
- Clarification provided that any concerns regarding housing associations should be directed to individual housing associations. The associations had certain responsibilities to maintain, and complaints procedures to follow in the first instance. The governing and regulating of housing associations was the responsibility of the Homes and Communities Agency.
- Recognition that factors that predominately influenced the bidding in terms of housing register choice were size, any adaptations if required and the area the property was situated.
- It was confirmed that regularly developers purchased land and worked with housing associations within the town.
- Acknowledgement that housing associations were not under obligation to provide any data on performance or customer satisfaction to the council and in many cases this was collected on a sub-regional, rather than a local basis.
- Whilst it was acknowledged that feedback information could be requested from a cohort from the housing association register, there was not a prerequisite to respond.
- It was noted that service standards and operations varied between individual housing associations – and between housing associations and the council.
- Housing Association board vacancies tended to be advertised independently through the press or websites.

RESOLVED

That the Commission thanked officers for attending the meeting and for providing a comprehensive explanation on a complicated topic.

7. Scrutiny Panel Update

A Scrutiny Suggestion had been received 'To investigate the state of social mobility within the borough' from the Leader, Councillor Lamb. The findings of the State of the Nation Social Mobility report from the Social Mobility Commission (November 2017) showed Crawley as one of the worst performing areas in the country, and potentially one of the worst in the south east.

The topic was discussed in detail with the Leader. Commission Members noted that this could potentially be a very long, wide and complex scrutiny review and there were concerns raised over the timescales, together with the expertise required to conduct the research and analysis required. However as the social mobility index assessed the education, employability and housing prospects of people within the area, it was noted that it may be possible for the review to be broken down into several subject areas to provide focus, concentrating on where it can add most value. It was noted it would be paramount to liaise with WSCC. The scoping framework would accommodate this and document witnesses to be invited as appropriate.

The Commission assessed the suitability of this topic against the Council's Scrutiny Selection Aid flowchart, which resulted in the topic being recommended as a possible review.

RESOLVED

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission approves the topic for a scrutiny review.
2. That nominations are sought (via Democratic Services) for the membership for the Panel, in accordance with political proportionality.
3. That a Chair for the new Scrutiny Panel be established.

8. Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC)

An update was provided from the most recent [HASC](#) meeting. Key items of discussion included:

- Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report – work was ongoing.
- Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust Regional Sub Group Progress Report – identified further issues to be addressed.
- South East Coast Ambulance NHS Trust Progress Report – highlighted further aspects to be raised at the next meeting.
- Next meeting would take place on 17 January 2018.

9. Forward Plan - and Provisional List of Reports for the Commission's following Meetings

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

March 2018

- Three Bridges Station Improvement Scheme.
- Crawley Leisure Management Contract.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.00 pm

B A Smith
Chair