

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Council-Owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Tuesday, 8 December 2020 at 6.30 pm

Councillors Present:

R A Lanzer (Chair)

M L Ayling, T Lunnon and D M Peck

Officers Present:

Sue Bader	Asset Manager
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Karen Hayes	Head of Corporate Finance
Jess Tamplin	Democratic Services Support Officer

Announcements

Councillor Guidera had decided that, due to his involvement and associations with Tilgate parade, he had a prejudicial conflicting interest in becoming a member of the Panel. He had decided to step down and there was therefore a vacant seat on the Panel. The vacancy would be filled before the next meeting.

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interest or whipping declarations were made.

2. Introduction to the Review: Setting the Scoping Framework and Timescales

The Chair gave an introduction to the review and summarised the information set out in the draft scoping framework. It was explained that the Panel would explore how effectively the Council's policies (namely the Property Strategy, 2004) support the 11 neighbourhood parades to meet their objectives of being both community assets to local residents and property assets to the Council. The Chair clarified that the Panel was not limited to the evaluation of rental rates, but had a wide scope which may include evaluation of such matters as:

- The various types of units/usages of shops on the parades
- The public footfall – and how this can be maintained or increased
- The current maintenance agreement between tenants and the Council
- The effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on the parade shops.

Panel members gave their thanks to the officers involved in compiling a detailed and thorough report ([FIN/499](#)) regarding the parades, which had been considered by the

Overview and Scrutiny Commission in June 2020. It was agreed that the report would assist the Panel's considerations and provided substantial background information.

The Panel expressed support for the notion of the parades being community assets, and discussed the need to ensure they continue to be meeting places for local people and to facilitate successful local businesses.

The Chair suggested, with agreement from Panel members, that a broad consultation should occur with local people via web surveys and the usage of community noticeboards. As part of the consultation process it was agreed that a witness session would be arranged with a relevant officer or councillor from a Council with a similar 'new town' nature and neighbourhood structure to Crawley. This would give an insight to neighbourhood parade strategies and objectives elsewhere. A further witness session was agreed with members of Crawley Borough Council's Community Services team to provide information on the public perception that there were crime and safety concerns at the parades. It was also suggested that Sussex Police could be consulted regarding this.

Officers answered a query regarding vacant units on the parades throughout Crawley, of which there were currently three (two of which were under offer, and the third was undergoing essential maintenance works). It was explained that interest in rental of the units was high and that usually the duration for which a unit was empty was due to the unit undergoing repairs.

Following a question from a Panel member regarding the rate of rent arrears, the Asset Manager noted that arrears were relatively high and had been exacerbated due to the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. It was heard that payment plans were in place to recover arrears and tenants were working with the Council to assist with this. The Panel agreed that its considerations should also have regard to the financial position of the Council in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

Officers gave details of Government business grants which were currently available for certain businesses, which may include those on the parades. Information was available on the Council's website and it was agreed that councillors would be contacted immediately to distribute this information to ward residents.

A recorded vote was taken to agree the scoping framework (as amended) in accordance with the Council's Virtual Committee Procedure Rules. The names of the councillors voting for and against the recommendation, along with any abstentions, were recorded as follows:

For:

Councillors Ayling, Lanzer, Lunnon, and Peck (4).

Against:

None.

Abstentions:

None.

RESOLVED

That the scoping framework be agreed (subject to amendments to incorporate the above suggestions).

3. Dates of Future Meetings

With the scoping framework agreed, Panel members considered it appropriate to agree the dates of the next two meetings of the Panel. The dates were confirmed as:

Tuesday 2 February 2021 at 6:30pm,
Thursday 11 March 2021 at 6:30pm.

It was agreed that the Panel would agree the dates of any further meetings at its meeting on 11 March.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Council-Owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.04 pm

R A Lanzer (Chair)

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Scoping Framework

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

PART 1: THE REVIEW

Section I - Terms of reference

To examine the various roles of council-owned neighbourhood parades to explore:

- How effectively these are currently being discharged.
- What improvements might be made for the future.

Section II – Reasons for the review

The Council owns 11 neighbourhood parades across Crawley. An important revenue stream is provided by the parades, which are intended to be 'community assets' due to the provision of local shopping facilities. The current neighbourhood parade policy (the [Property Strategy](#)) was adopted in May 2004 and aimed for a commercial approach to the Council's property portfolio. The policy has been in place for 16 years, so there is an opportunity to examine how effective it has been over this substantial time period in meeting its objectives.

The desired outcome is an appraisal of the effectiveness of neighbourhood parade policies in meeting agreed objectives since May 2004 and consideration of possible changes for the future.

Section III - Key objectives of review

The review will involve consideration of the following:

- How successful has the revenue stream from the parades been under the current policy? How important is this revenue stream to council services?
- Are the parades perceived as 'community assets' by locals (an objective of the Property Strategy)? If so, how do the parades meet this objective? E.g. how successfully do they provide access to shops without the need to travel? Does the diversity of shops fulfil this?
- What else do residents want from their local parade(s)?
- Consideration of the information provided within report [FIN/499](#) regarding:
 - The current tenant/use mix of the parades and changes of use over time.
 - The number of vacant units.
 - The number (and usage requirements) of parties on the waiting list for a unit.
 - The policy regarding flats over the retail units.
 - The policy regarding the 21 year rule on extensions to the property.
 - The policy for responsibility for maintenance.

And whether these matters meet the objectives of the Local Plan.

- Clarity on the rent review/lease renewal process.
- Analysis of the real increase in rents allowing for inflation (RPI).
- How a potential tenant's ability to run a business is assessed/supported – the Council offers some signposting to resources but is limited in the ways it can help support tenants to run a business (such as training/guidance).
- How the Coronavirus pandemic has affected retail on the parades.
- The financial position of the Council in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic.

After consideration of the above, what options might there be for change?

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Section IV - What will not be included in the scope (and why)?

It is proposed that the review should be kept proportionate, by focusing on the aims, objectives and scope as set out in the suggestion form, in order to target the areas which will add the most value. The scope could be very wide-reaching but should be kept to considerations which are directly relevant to the matter at hand.

Scrutiny should not duplicate any other work currently being undertaken within the Council.

PART 2: EVIDENCE GATHERING AND PLANNING

Section V - Key documents and background information the panel may find useful

1. [Property Strategy May 2004](#)
2. [Report FIN/499 - Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Introductory Report](#)
3. [Competition Act 1988](#)
4. ["Running of Crawley's neighbourhood parades to be reviewed", Crawley Observer, 10.06.20](#)
5. [Facebook post and public comments – "what would you change about your nearest neighbourhood parade if you could?" Crawley Observer](#)
6. [CBC website – support and advice during the Coronavirus outbreak for business and employers](#)
7. [Gov.uk website – financial support for businesses during coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
8. Information and evidence from CBC officers
9. Witness sessions with relevant parties
10. Consultation with public.

Regard should be had for current (and proposed) policy documents and legislation when undertaking the panel's work to ensure compliance with Council policies and priorities.

Any consultation will need to take into account Coronavirus restrictions and the safety of residents and CBC staff, together with resources and time constraints. The CfPS guidance on understanding scrutiny work during the Coronavirus pandemic can be found [here](#). Early discussion with the communications team will be essential.

Section VI – Suggested witnesses to be invited

<u>Organisation/Position</u>	<u>Type of Feedback</u>	<u>Reason for Inviting</u>
CBC Asset Manager	Witness session	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To provide information on how the current strategy has worked in regard to the revenue stream and how important this revenue is to council services, together with information on how rents are calculated. Gather their views on the Property Strategy and suggestions for any areas for improvement.• NB - discussion may be in exempt session.

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Head of Corporate Finance/Chief Accountant	Witness session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assist the panel in its analysis of the real increase in rents allowing for inflation (RPI) and the revenue stream gathered from the parades. Gather their suggestions for any areas for improvement. NB - discussion may be in exempt session.
Community Services Manager/Officer	Witness session (feedback on Facebook – see V.5 above – is partly focused on crime and disorder issues on the parades)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide the panel with a perspective on the community safety aspects of/nearby the neighbourhood parades.
Cabinet Members	Witness sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather views on the current strategy. To provide information on how residents may be affected by the Coronavirus situation and the impact this may have on the parades (and how/to what extent they are meeting the objectives).
External Representative of a similar 'new town' council	Witness session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To give information on neighbourhood parade strategies/policies elsewhere in order to compare to those of CBC.
Letting Agent	Witness session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To update on the Coronavirus situation and give views on how the policy works in practice.
Parade tenants	Witness sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To give views on how the policy works in practice and to recognise and understand any changes tenants would like made.
Sussex Police	Witness session or information provided through CBC Community Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide the panel with a perspective on the community safety aspects of/nearby the neighbourhood parades.

Section VII - Site Visits by Panel Members <i>(dependent on Coronavirus restrictions and safety)</i>		
<u>Location/Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Purpose of Visit</u>
TBC	TBC	TBC

<p>Section VIII - Community Engagement Proposals</p> <p>Consultation with the public via web survey, publicised via community noticeboards. In-person and paper-based consultation more difficult to ensure Covid safe. Details of survey questions TBC.</p>

Agenda Item

PART 3: ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKLIST

Section IX – Planning the Panel’s Work Programme		
	<u>Date (prov)</u>	<u>Details: (e.g. witnesses, objectives etc.)</u>
Projected start date	Nov 20	
Panel meeting 1	08/12/20	Background report and scoping framework
Panel meeting 2	02/02/21	Possible witness sessions (details TBC)
Panel meeting 3	11/03/21	
Panel meeting 4	TBC	
Panel meeting 5	TBC	
Panel meeting 6	TBC	
Further meetings IF REQUIRED – or by email		

Section X - Resources and Responsibilities	
Chair	Cllr Lanzer
Members	Cllrs Ayling, Lanzer, Lunnon, Mwangale, and Peck
Lead Officers	Sue Bader (Asset Manager) Karen Hayes (Head of Corporate Finance)
Democratic Services Officer	Jess Tamplin
Head of Service	Head of Corporate Finance

Section XI - Reporting Arrangements	
<u>Committee/body</u>	<u>Date (prov.)</u>
Final report of panel to Overview and Scrutiny Commission	TBC
Final report to Cabinet (as appropriate)	TBC
Final report to other committee, Full Council or body (as appropriate)	TBC

Section XII – Approvals		
<u>Details</u>	<u>By whom</u>	<u>Date</u>
Terms of reference/Panel agreed	OSC	28/09/20
Scoping Framework - drafted	Democratic Services	Nov 20
Scoping Framework - first agreed	Panel	08/12/20