

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 1 November 2021 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T G Belben (Chair)

K Khan (Vice-Chair)

M L Ayling, R G Burgess, S Mullins, A Nawaz, S Piggott and B A Smith

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett, I T Irvine, M G Jones and P K Lamb

Officers Present:

Rob Beasey	Planned Maintenance Manager
Carron Burton	HR and OD Manager
Ian Duke	Deputy Chief Executive
Trish Emmans	Community Safety Officer
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Simon Jones	Head of Digital and Transformation
Matt Lethbridge	Community Services Manager
Joe Mottershead	HR Consultant
Geoff Tarran	Asset Surveyor and Compliance Manager
Kate Wilson	Head of Community Services
Inspector Steve Turner	Sussex Police

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor R A Lanzer and A Pendlington

1. Disclosures of Interest and Whipping Declarations

No disclosures or whipping of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 27 September 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

It was queried whether any events had taken place as part of Local Democracy week as the minutes had stated further discussions were to take place. It was confirmed enquiries would be made outside the meeting.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Safer Crawley Partnership Annual Review and Forthcoming Priorities

The Commission received an update from Inspector Turner, the Head of Community Services, Community Services Manager and the Community Safety Officer, together with Councillor Jones on the annual performance report of the Safer Crawley Partnership along with the future priorities. During the discussion, the following points were expressed:

The purpose of the Safer Crawley Partnership was to reduce re-offending, tackle crime and disorder, anti-social behaviour, alcohol and substance misuse and any other behaviour which had a negative effect on the local community so that people in Crawley were safer and felt safer.

Statutory partners included: WSCC, Sussex Police, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service, Probation Service and Crawley Clinical Commissioning Group together with other partners including OSPCC, Crawley Community Action, Crawley Open House, Crawley & Gatwick Business Watch and CGL.

The Four priorities:

- Serious and Organised Crime (Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking)
- Street Community
- Protecting Vulnerable Individuals
- Business Crime

2020-2021 funding included:

- Funding allocation from Sussex PCC - £51,362,87
- Project funded in 2020-21
 - £7,200 Greater Change
 - £12,000 West Sussex Analyst post. Responsible for producing the Strategic Intelligence Assessment which uses local data to focus priorities areas and identify core issues in Crawley and assists in using resources effectively.
 - £600 training on Community Protection Notices & Criminal Behaviour Orders
 - £10,000 town centre security presence
 - £7,000 Audio Active SHIFT project. The project targets groups of young people involved in or at risk of being in, anti-social behaviour.
 - £2,106 Maidenbower Park car park CCTV

In terms of crime data, stalking and harassment figures had increased, however this could be attributed to better reporting of offences and dedicated campaigns. Crimes with a weapon marker had decreased due to a change in legislation. A recent knife amnesty in schools and publicity together with reporting methods had improved so actual possession with a weapon was in decline.

The make-up of the Neighbourhood Policing Team was discussed as the PCSOs were allocated for each area with in-depth training, increased knowledge and being able to network with key stakeholders.

2020-2021 Key Achievements included:

- Serious and Organised Crime (SOC) – joined up group able to identify vulnerable individuals and groups.

- Street Community – joint working to liaise and work with partners on a regular basis to tackle street homelessness, begging and street drinking, but also enforcement powers were used for those that unfortunately were not willing to engage due to the complexity of their needs. The move to virtual meetings due to the pandemic and lockdown had seen better representation from key partners at the monthly multi-agency meeting. Recruitment and retention of staff for the Rough Sleeping Initiative funded multi-disciplinary team had been an issue, however this team has been a valuable addition.
- Protecting Vulnerable Individuals – There was continued awareness raising of domestic abuse and hate crime support services. Meetings with partners ensures the scope of cases, supporting of individuals and preventative work.
- Business Crime – The relationship with the Crawley and Gatwick Business Watch had been re-established and there were 3 Town Centre PCSOs, which fed into the fortnightly intelligence meetings which resulted in good and effective use of ASB legislation.

Other Achievements:

- Action had been taken to deter the use of Sussex House car park (Morrisons) by car cruisers. It was recognised there was a challenge around car nuisance.
- CCTV deployed at Maidenbower Park car park in response to car cruising activities.
- Supported the continued delivery of Audio Active SHIFT project.

Challenges/Emerging Issues:

- The pandemic has impacted on poverty and it was recognised there had been an impact on shoplifting as lockdown had lifted.
- It was noted that last year saw significant issues within the town centre, serious organised crime, county lines, modern day slavery and trafficking and these were multifaceted issues and recognition of the good partnership working being of paramount importance in addressing those issues. This continued to provide considerable achievements in order to deliver the priorities and the challenges.
- Increase in demonstrations/protests following the pandemic. It was recognised there was a balance to be met.

During the discussion Councillors made the following comments:

- It was pleasing that PCSOs had been reinstated for each area.
- Confirmation that whilst the representatives from MRBD and TCBD did not attend the sub group meetings, there was regular liaison as part of the business sector and the 3 town centre PCSOs. There were also partnerships and liaison with the local parades allowing for network opportunities and this linked into the PCSO's patrol plans. It was noted that some issues occurred at the parades and there was perhaps a reliance on CCTV, which was not monitored 24/7. There was funding for a mobile CCTV unit.
- Confirmation that liaison and engagement with partners continued to assist in raising awareness and supportive vulnerable individuals.
- Recognition that joint working to tackle street homelessness, begging and street drinking had resulted in a reduction in the numbers of rough sleepers.
- Acknowledgement that cybercrime and scams were now playing a part in deceiving the elderly population. Various deterrents could be considered along with marketing to assist in scam prevention.
- Recognition that whilst supportive of self-defence for women and girls there was a movement around focusing on the behaviour of the perpetrator.
- It was important to continue to report crime or possible crime as this would aid intelligence gathering.
- A copy of the full presentation would be made available (potentially through Councillors' Information Bulletin).

RESOLVED

That the update be noted with the views expressed being acknowledged by officers. The Commission's gratitude was relayed to Inspector Turner and officers for their attendance at the Commission.

5. Staff Sickness Levels with Covid 19 and the Effects of Working from Home Update Report

At its meeting on 7 June 2021, Commission members considered report [LDS/166](#) of the Head of Legal, Governance and HR. Under the scrutiny procedure rules, Councillor T Belben had requested a report on staff sickness levels with Covid19 and the effects and impacts of working from home in June 2021. The Commission had requested an update on the staffing situation and the effects on working from home. Report [LDS/175](#) detailed that update and during the discussion with the HR and OD Manager and HR Consultant, the following points were expressed:

- The Council's offer of support to staff has been made through the learning and development programme. The support outlined in report [LDS/166](#) remains. Part of the offer with further workshops for all colleagues have been delivered by Microsoft Teams and CBC Learning Channel and the workshop offer for people managers had been increased. The Council's Wellbeing Team also delivered various sessions as an aid to assist employees.
- From September 2021 staff were asked to have a presence in the office two days per week if full time and one day a week for part time staff and the council had seen little resistance to this change and adaptation to hybrid working.
- Staff surveys continued to be carried out and whilst the overall results continued to remain positive, one area that saw a downward trend was that staff were finding workload levels more challenging.
- It was noted that the legacy of the Covid pandemic will remain with the council for a long time to come.

Commission Members then raised a number of queries. The issues raised and the key responses included:

- The Council did not monitor whether its staff had received their Covid vaccination but they were encouraged to take up the offer of the vaccination.
- It was pleasing that the Council had continued to provide flu vaccines for staff and this take up had increased annually.
- Acknowledgement that clients' tolerance levels have been impacted and they were displaying varying behaviours of impatience, intolerance and some were challenging. A piece of work was in progress to monitor this to ascertain intervention materials and training for staff if required.
- Confirmation provided that the offices were and remained Covid-secure. There were strict measures in place that were maintained.
- Recognition that the pandemic had resulted in added pressure on staff. It was noted there would be other challenges the workforce may face going forwards: people leaving the workforce through retirement, people not having the usual holidays of choice so maybe not being fully recharged, the impact of viral infections colds may increase winter approaches.
- It was recognised there was a 'new normal' and staff had adopted skills which were interchangeable between home and office. Should a further lockdown ensue, staff would adopt an agile approach to be able to 'flex-back' to home working.
- The Commission took the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the council staff for the work that had been undertaken throughout the pandemic and the increasing pressure that had been placed upon them.

- It was recommended that the OSC to receive an annual update on situation and staff welfare.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report with the views expressed being acknowledged and documented by the officers. It was agreed that the Commission receives an annual update on staff welfare.

6. Review of the Transformation Plan

Commission Members considered report [DCE/09](#) of the Deputy Chief Executive. The Commission has within its function to review the council's transformation programme, measures, and performance information (including budgetary information) together with service reviews.

Transformation consists of time-limited projects to drive strategic change in order to meet corporate objectives. These are projects that generally lie outside of any single service and require impetus and additional resource / focus in order to deliver and embed that change. The aim was to create change and for that change to become business as usual. Much progress had been made and the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic had accelerated the Transformation Plan, in particular in terms of new ways of working, values and behaviours and digital transformation.

The Transformation Plan included:

- Channel Shift – reflected the massive shift to online work, which included how residents wished to interact with the council. There were huge advantages to the council in terms of efficiencies. The 'MyCrawley' commenced with 10,000 accounts and subsequently had over 30,000. It was paramount to ascertain the reasons why individuals chose not to migrate to an electronic form.
- New Ways of Working – the pandemic resulted in teams being able to support customers and deliver services in new ways with the rollout of new technology. The migration of systems to the Cloud had seen improvements and efficiencies that would continue.
- People Strategy – the focus on wellbeing and people needed to continue, together with embedding the success of the values and behaviours into all areas of HR, supporting staff and processes.
- Service Re-design – this and commercialisation would fit with the budget strategy and how the council would aim to meet the financial challenges of Covid, better support its communities and perform better as an organisation. It was noted that it was beneficial to take a holistic approach to delivering services and creating efficiencies which ultimately improve outcomes.
- Commercialisation (PIPES model) - whilst it was acknowledged there was much uncertainty facing the Council and difficult decisions around future service provision, having a more commercial mind-set opens up opportunities to help it better manage these challenges and minimise the need for future reductions in services. This theme focused on developing new ideas, new income streams, greater efficiencies and savings to ensure the continued provision of high quality and sustainable frontline services. The "Bright Ideas" initiative, invites staff and councillors to submit creative and innovative ways to help tackle the financial challenges.
- Assets – it was important to think how the council used its estate and how this use could be improved – "use it better".

Following the discussion with the Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Digital and Transformation, Councillors raised a number of queries:

- It was recognised that much work that was taking place could impact on staff and concern was expressed how this was monitored. Staff surveys provided reliable data and feedback but the changes had been planned, merely enacted at a faster pace and staff had adopted skills which were interchangeable between home and office. However the pressure on staff had not been underestimated.
- Confirmation that there was a need to ensure the changes resulting from any transformation work needed to be established in the workplace prior to any further adjustments. There were many opportunities to be addressed and explored.
- Work from other councils and organisations was being explored to identify opportunities and networking possibilities.
- It was suggested there may be potential for YouTube training videos to assist the public for MyCrawley accounts.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report, with the views expressed being acknowledged and documented by the officers.

7. Major Works at Milton Mount Flats

Commission Members considered report [DCE/10](#) of the Deputy Chief Executive. Under the scrutiny procedure rules, Councillor T Belben had requested a report on the major works currently being undertaken at Milton Mount flats, particularly in relation to the water pressure.

During the discussion with the Deputy Chief Executive, Asset Surveyor and Compliance Manager and the Planned Maintenance Manager, the following points were expressed:

- The scale of the works had posed a challenge for the council. It was important to put the needs of the tenants and leaseholders first and yet it was acknowledged that there would be a cost to leaseholders to be applied proportionately and as sensitively as possible as it was recognised that the costs would be significant, although payment schemes may be possible.
- Disappointment was expressed that it had not been possible to secure the attendance of Southern Water at the meeting.
- Confirmation that compensation would only be acted upon where there was fault, and it was not the Council's insistence that external metering must be provided for a new mains cold water connection.
- It was acknowledged that the reports of low pressure from the flats were extensive, with the residents' survey demonstrating that almost half of the respondents have had issues with water pressure.
- The report was praised by the Commission for documenting the timeline, together with highlighting the investigations and consultations. It also included the other works which had been carried out within the maintenance programme.
- Recognition that works were dependent on the weather and procurement of materials. The works themselves would hopefully take 6 months to complete and once finalised should provide regular pressure to the flats.
- It was confirmed the works were not related to the previous gas leak that took place in January 2021.
- Officers were thanked for their work throughout the process in balancing the views of all involved and in managing expectations.

RESOLVED

That the Commission acknowledges and notes the report and is satisfied with the works undertaken.

8. Forthcoming Decision List - and Provisional List of Reports for the Commission's following Meetings

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

22 November

1. Budget Strategy 2022/23 – 2026/27
2. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2021-2022
3. 2021/2022 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2
4. Crawley Economic Recovery Plan
5. Climate change Emergency Action Plan
6. Unsupervised Play Investment Programme
7. Crawley Fusion Innovation Centre Scheme Business Case (Part B)

10 January

1. Information on Option 3 in relation to Petition – 'Keep your dog on a lead in Tilgate park'.

31 January

1. 2022/2023 Budget and Council Tax
2. Treasury Management Strategy 2022-2023
3. 2021/2022 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3
4. Town Centre Regeneration Programme v3

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.58 pm

T G Belben (Chair)