

Crawley Borough Council

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Agenda for the **Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel** which will be held in **Ashurst Main Hall - The Charis Centre**, on **Thursday, 14 October 2021 at 7.00 pm**

Nightline Telephone No. 07881 500 227



Chief Executive

Membership:

Councillors

R A Lanzer (Chair), M L Ayling, T Lunnon, S Mullins, M Mwangale and
D M Peck

Please note: the current Covid-19 protocol for formal meetings of the Council, including social distancing and wearing of masks, remains in place. Councillors and attendees will be informed should there be any changes to the protocol.

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The order of business may change at the Chair's discretion

Part A Business (Open to the Public)

	Pages
1. Apologies for Absence	
2. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations	
<p>In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, councillors are reminded that it is a requirement to declare interests where appropriate.</p> <p>Councillors must also declare if they are subject to their party group whip in relation to any items under consideration.</p>	
3. Minutes	5 - 8
<p>To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel held on 26 July 2021.</p>	
4. General Updates and Information	
<p>To receive any relevant updates and information from Panel members and officers.</p>	
5. Witness Sessions	
<p>The Panel has invited the following witnesses to attend the meeting to help inform the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crawley Borough Council's Neighbourhood Services Manager.• Members of staff from Graves Jenkins, the agency used for the letting of the Council's commercial units.• Current tenants of Council-owned neighbourhood parades shops. <p>Whilst these individuals are anticipated to speak at the meeting, this may change subject to availability and at the discretion of the Chair. Further witnesses may be called in addition to, or instead of, those listed above.</p>	

6. Evaluation of Scoping Framework

9 - 12

To consider the previously agreed scoping framework and, in doing so:

- Evaluate the Scrutiny Panel's progress to date in examining all elements of the framework, and
- Decide what information, if any, is required to ensure the framework is fully met.

The scoping framework is attached as Appendix A.

7. Date of Next Meeting

To confirm the date of the next meeting of the Panel. Proposed dates include:

Thursday 4 November
Wednesday 8 December
or
Thursday 9 December.

8. Supplemental Agenda

Any urgent item(s) complying with Section 100(B) of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Agenda Item 3

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel (22)
26 July 2021

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 26 July 2021 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

R A Lanzer (Chair)

M L Ayling, T Lunnon, M Mwangale and D M Peck

Officers Present:

Sue Bader

Asset Manager

Richard Gammie

Senior Asset Surveyor

Karen Hayes

Head of Corporate Finance

Jess Tamplin

Democratic Services Support Officer

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor S Mullins

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P C Smith

Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interest or whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel held on 23 June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. General Updates and Information

The following updates were presented to the Panel.

Free Retail Training for Independent Businesses

The Chair gave details of a new free retail training programme to be offered to independent business across West Sussex. The programme, West Sussex Retail Hub, was a project formed by borough and district councils and consisted of pre-

Agenda Item 3

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel (23)
26 July 2021

recorded sessions, live events, and resources giving information and advice on running a business. The following modules were on offer:

- Measuring sales, tracking profitability
- Key steps for creating a marketing plan
- The importance of business planning
- Employing staff: an introduction to HR for small businesses
- Using social media for business outcomes
- Card payments and electronic point of sale
- Understanding today's customer
- Creating an exceptional customer experience
- Developing a quality customer experience for the modern independent retailer
- Developing new business models that work effectively and efficiently.

Modules were accessible at each retailer's convenience until 2024. Weekly live Q&A sessions were to be held every Wednesday until 22nd September 2021. All resources were available at www.westsussexretailhub.co.uk.

Actions:

- That details of the West Sussex Retail Hub be sent to current neighbourhood parade shop tenants via email.
- That Panel members publicise the Hub to their ward residents.

Comparisons to Other Local Authorities

Following previous discussions by Panel members, information was presented regarding several key factors in the commercial leases of local authorities to which the Panel had previously drawn comparisons.

The information, as follows, was based on unit advertisements and council policies.

	Rent Rates	Rent Reviews	Repairs
Crawley	Market rent	Upwards only every 5 years	All external and internal inc structure and roof
Dacorum	Market rent (lower rates for some public sector and third sector)	Upwards only every 5 years	All internal and shopfront inc doors and windows
Lewisham	Unknown	5 year leases	All external and internal inc windows
Knowsley	Market rent	Upwards only every five years	All internal and external excl structure of roof, floor, load bearing walls, foundations

Details of Business Grants and Arrears

The Head of Corporate Finance gave the following updates:

- £2.048 million in business grants had been paid to neighbourhood parade shop tenants by the Council since March 2020.
- The current total of arrears owed by parade tenants to the Council was £625,400.

Agenda Item 3

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel (24)
26 July 2021

Following a query from a Panel member about the publicising of business grants, it was clarified that tenants had been made aware of grants available to them via email, mailshots, and direct conversation with the Council's Finance team. It was also confirmed that the grants were not restricted for specific purposes; there were guidelines but it was a tenant's choice as to how to spend the money received. Grants were received by tenants in arrears and those without arrears.

The Panel discussed the arrears owed. It was heard that individual plans had been arranged for as many tenants as possible to ensure repayment of arrears at a fair and appropriate rate. Tenants that had not taken up a repayment plan were encouraged to do so to help manage their arrears.

Overview of Possible Recommendation Topics

The Panel discussed the matters raised at previous meetings that were identified as possible topics for future recommendations.

1. The provision of business advice to parade tenants.

The Panel proposed that the Council's Business and Economic Development team be requested to assist in providing support to new and existing tenants regarding the running of their businesses. The support would be focused on the suggestions made by tenants as part of the consultation.

Following a query about Crawley Live magazine, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development confirmed that parade shops are able to advertise in the magazine for the rates set out on the Council's website. The Panel floated a proposal to give each new parade business, upon its opening, a free advert in the magazine. It was also suggested to include a feature in each issue giving details of the shops on each parade respectively.

A further suggestion was made that a 'buddy system' could be set up by the Council for parade tenants to support one another in the running of their businesses. This could be based on use class or location.

2. A recurring questionnaire for parade tenants to provide feedback to the Council regarding their tenancy experience.

Panel members proposed that the questionnaire could be published annually and answers reported back to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development. It was also suggested that an annual Q&A session could be held in the form of a tenants' forum with officers of the Council. This suggestion could be included in the first questionnaire.

3. A simplification of the wording used in the Council's commercial leases.

Officers informed the Panel that new tenants were informed their lease is legally binding and were recommended to seek legal advice before accepting its terms. The Panel agreed that a plain English dictionary could be included at the beginning of each lease prepared by the Council in order to assist tenants in their understanding of the terms used. It was agreed that this was to be published as soon as was practicable. Panel members also discussed the support offered to tenants with English as a second language.

4. Support for a zero tolerance policy on alcohol consumption at the parades.

Agenda Item 3

Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel (25)
26 July 2021

The Panel discussed the ways in which alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour were controlled. It was noted that a Public Space Protection Order relating to alcohol consumption was in place throughout Crawley but it was agreed that enforcement of this could always be improved. Panel members discussed the possibility of working with Community Wardens, PCSOs, and Sussex Police Officers to encourage effective enforcement.

5. Support for a review of the CCTV coverage at the shopping parades.

Panel members discussed the possibility of influencing a review of CCTV at the parades including the cameras' placement and lines of sight, modernisation, effectiveness, and ease of monitoring. It was agreed that the Council's Neighbourhood Services Patch Officers and parade tenants could be consulted as part of the review to enhance the CCTV coverage. The Panel also suggested the installation of more signage warning the public about the presence of CCTV.

Actions:

- That the possible recommendation topics raised as part of the Panel's discussion be carried forward for consideration at its future meetings.

4. Witness Sessions

The Committee was informed that, since the publication of the agenda, the invited witnesses had become unable to attend the meeting.

Actions:

- That the scheduled witness sessions be rearranged to a future Panel meeting.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Panel members considered proposed dates for future meetings of the Panel. It was agreed that the next meeting be scheduled for Wednesday 22 September 2021 at 7.00pm.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.07pm.

R A Lanzer (Chair)

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?

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.

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. To provide the panel with a perspective on the community safety aspects of/nearby the neighbourhood parades. 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). To give information on neighbourhood parade strategies/policies elsewhere in order to compare to those of CBC. To update on the Coronavirus situation and give views on how the policy works in practice. To give views on how the policy works in practice and to recognise and understand any changes tenants would like made. To provide the panel with a perspective on the community safety aspects of/nearby the neighbourhood parades.
Community Services Manager/Officer	Witness session (feedback on Facebook – see V.5 above – is partly focused on crime and disorder issues on the parades)	
Cabinet Members	Witness sessions	
External Representative of a similar 'new town' council	Witness session	
Letting Agent	Witness session	
Parade tenants	Witness sessions	
Sussex Police	Witness session or information provided through CBC Community Services	

Section VII - Site Visits by Panel Members *(dependent on Coronavirus restrictions and safety)*

<u>Location/Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Purpose of Visit</u>
TBC	TBC	TBC

Section VIII - Community Engagement Proposals

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.

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	Reviews by other LAs; CBC Asset Management & Community Services witness sessions
Panel meeting 3	11/03/21	Details of consultation
Panel meeting 4	23/06/21	Results of consultation; tenant witness sessions
Panel meeting 5	26/07/21	Assessment of the panel’s progress/recommendations so far
Panel meeting 6	14/10/21	CBC Neighbourhood Services & Graves Jenkins witness sessions
Further meetings – if required		

Section X - Resources and Responsibilities	
Chair	Cllr Lanzer
Members	Cllrs Ayling, Lunnon, S Mullins, Mwagale, and Peck
Lead Officers	Sue Bader/ Richard Gammie (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