

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 27 November 2023 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

M L Ayling (Chair)

H Hellier (Vice-Chair)

I Ashraf, K Khan, R A Lanzer, T Lunnon, J Millar-Smith, S Piggott, S Pritchard and J Russell

Also in Attendance:

Councillor M G Jones

Officers Present:

Vicki Basley

Chief Accountant

Ian Duke

Chief Executive

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

Carolin Martlew

Head of Corporate Finance

Clem Smith

Head of Economy and Planning

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor A Pendlington

1. Disclosures of Interest and Whipping Declarations

The following disclosures were made:

Councillor	Item and Minute	Type and Nature of Disclosure
Councillor R A Lanzer	Crawley Station Gateway – Phase 1 (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Crawley Station Gateway – Phase 1 (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member Representative on the Crawley Growth Programme
Councillor R A Lanzer	Western Boulevard Scheme – Crawley Growth Programme (Minute 8)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Western Boulevard Scheme – Crawley Growth Programme (Minute 8)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member Representative on the Crawley Growth Programme

Councillor R A Lanzer	Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest – Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing
Councillor R A Lanzer	Crawley Innovation Centre – Additional Towns Fund Monies (Minute 13)	Personal Interest – Member of Town Deal Board

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 30 October 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. 2023/2024 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2

The Commission considered report [FIN/635](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report set out a summary of the Council's actual revenue and capital spending for the quarters to September 2023 together with the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Explanation provided on the latest revenue and capital budget.
- Acknowledgement that the interest rate projections would be kept under regular review during the year and acknowledged the risk of being heavily reliant on investments when interest rates begin to fall.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the costings on various elements for the new town hall.
- Confirmation that project Jupiter referred to the works at Metcalf Way Depot.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

5. Budget Strategy 2024/25 – 2026/27

The Commission considered report [FIN/636](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report set out financial projections with particular reference to the period 2024/25 – 2026/27. The report set out the policy framework for improving financial efficiency and meeting the long-term investment needs of the Town, as well as proposals for the annual budget process.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Recognition that Ashdown House may remain vacant for a period from 2024 and this would allow the building to be refurbished and a new tenant to be sought.

Similarly, it would be important for the Ask building to be renovated and re-let as soon as practicable.

- Explanation provided of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) review having identified a saving of £778k in 2023/24 being due to technical adjustments also identified future year savings by taking a payment holiday and switching the calculation to an annuity basis. The methodology being prudent due to the debt relating to the appropriation of garages from the HRA to the General fund.
- It was questioned whether the average increase in the fees and charges forecast of 3.5% was too lenient, in comparison with fees and charges having to be increased by a minimum of 7% (where feasible). It was queried whether fees and charges could potentially be increased higher than 7%, however, it then was noted that there was a balance to be made between covering the cost of the service whilst also remaining competitive. Further explanation was provided, that the forecasting model was a tool that did not distinguish between fees that could be increased and for example fees that were set by statute or rents.
- Recognition that additional cost pressure were predicted to impact the budget, resulting in a net overspend of £2.516m in the current year, some of these related to homelessness, pay award, town hall rates and inflation.
- It was commented that whilst there had recently been changes to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the overall impact was yet unknown, and whilst it would help private tenants to stay in their tented accommodation, it was confirmed that the LHA related to the recovery of Housing Benefit remained frozen and would not improve the budget position going forward, which remained unsustainable. However temporary accommodation was identified on the corporate risk register and would be constantly monitored and continued to be reported in future monitoring reports.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

6. Treasury Management Mid Year Review 2023-2024

The Commission considered report [FIN/637](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report provided an update on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2023/24.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that the ethical investment policy was considered prior to every investment undertaking.
- Confirmation sought on the investment performance (Bail-in Exposure) and officers would look into the possibility of providing equivalent figures in pounds sterling. It was thought that it would be beneficial that a "*Bail-In*" definition be provided within the report.
- Explanation was sought on the investment limits across detailed holdings and portfolios.
- Recognition that the new strategy would be approved by Full Council in February 2024 (having been considered at OSC and Cabinet).
- Confirmation that the Council's treasury advisor was Arlingclose Limited, and the Council would have to make a decision to diverge from the advice provided. It was important that in accordance with the Treasury Management Code that the Council's investments priorities were security of capital, liquidity, yield and ethical investment policy.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

7. Crawley Station Gateway - Phase 1

The Commission considered report [PES/443](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning. The report presented the refreshed concept designs for Station Gateway (Phase 1) public realm and bus station improvements. It sought approval to go out to public and stakeholder consultation and seek approval to combine two funding streams (Crawley Growth Programme and Towns Fund) already allocated within the Council's capital programme.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that the delivery of the detailed designs of the scheme would be delivered as part of the Crawley Growth programme.
- Clarification was obtained regarding various elements of the concept design including connectivity improvements for pedestrians and cyclists, together with route access and pick up/drop off areas.
- Recognition that the Council would be working closely with partners and stakeholders to provide a greatly improved cycle and pedestrian access between Crawley railway station, bus station, County Mall and The Martlets. Delivering an enhanced bus station would also result in improved bus and traffic flow around Friary Way, including a dedicated left hand turn for buses from Friary Way onto Station Way.
- Confirmation provided regarding the £7.4m funding to deliver the scheme ("Phase 1") which was in anticipation of a renewed bid to be led by WSCC to Department for Transport in the future for "Phase 2" Station Way highway/bus lane infrastructure upgrades. It was noted that other sites under development along Station Way/Haslett Avenue had already taken account of the scheme within the development.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

8. Western Boulevard Scheme - Crawley Growth Programme

The Commission considered report [PES/442](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning. The report updated on the progress of the Western Boulevard scheme as part of the Crawley Growth Programme with a recommendation that Full Council agree to add £2m of BSIP (Bus Service Improvement Plan) monies to the scheme, which have been secured, subject to a funding agreement with West Sussex County Council.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Recognition that the scheme was set to deliver significant improvements to bus connectivity in the town centre alongside better sustainable transport facilities. It would widen The Boulevard/The Broadway junction, giving priority to buses turning in and out of the junction as well as improve cycle facilities in the area by continuing the segregated cycle tracks on The Boulevard completing the link from the Eastern Gateway to the existing cycle infrastructure on the High Street.

- Clarification was obtained regarding various punctuated cycle lanes within the scheme, together with the exit closures and carriageway improvements.
- Acknowledgement that funding would be required in order for the scheme to be fully completed along The Boulevard.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

9. Exempt Information – Exclusion of the Public

RESOLVED

That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.

10. Crawley Innovation Centre - Additional Towns Fund Monies

Exempt Paragraph 3

Information relating to financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information)

The Commission considered report PES/449 of the Head of Economy and Planning. The report sought agreement to add Towns Fund monies to the Crawley Innovation Centre project and additional delegations to ensure the project could commence without delay. The draft Towns Fund business case for the Crawley Innovation Centre was agreed by Cabinet on 2nd February 2022 and Full Council on 23rd February 2022.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Economy and Planning the following comments were made:

- Confirmation provided of the processes which had taken place throughout the project were highlighted.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the financial aspects contained within the report.
- Acknowledgement that the Innovation Centre still enabled the Council to deliver on opportunities, whilst protecting, consolidating and enhancing economic diversity.
- Whilst there was support for the proposal which was poised to play a key and interesting role in delivering on future needs within the town, concern was raised regarding the reallocation of £2m of Crawley Towns Fund monies from the Town Centre to Manor Royal cycle route project and this should be noted for the future.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

Re-admission of the Public

The Chair declared the meeting re-open for consideration of business in public session.

11. Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

An update was provided from the most recent HASC meeting. Key items of discussion included:

- Quarterly Performance and Resources Report –
 - Inspections were carried out for all health care services across the county, with Furnace Drive featured in Crawley (Burleys Wood), which was last inspected in 2018 and receiving a good rating. Due to pressures, assessments were currently being prioritising by the highest demand cases, and there were assessments overdue allocation (by approximately 4 weeks) and it was acknowledged that there was room for improvement.
- Update on delivery of the two-year improvement programme 2023-2025 to assist the delivery of the Adult Social Care Strategy 2022-25 –
 - Delivery of the programme was currently being supported by the council's Transformation Plan, which was agreed in early 2023. Workforce recruitment and retention issues remained a key issue for West Sussex as well as independent voluntary sector providers. Work delivered throughout 2022-2023-2024 was supported by the Transformation funding and provided as the foundations for further improvements and service developments.
- Update on Council Plan, Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Preparations for 2024/25 Draft Budget
 - Council tax remained the key source of funding. The proposed increase in fees and charges for 2024-2025 was 8.1% in line with the estimate of retail price index as of September 2023.
- Sussex System Winter Plan 2023-24 – November 2023
 - The plan was currently underway and provided an assurance to partners of the system of the measures in place to deliver the health and social care needs of the local population that would be met over the winter period.
 - NHS Sussex's plans relating to West Sussex residents highlighted any specific challenges and risks and how these are being addressed. The system was not yet achieving consistent delivery of the A&E 4-hour standard in emergency departments at the target level set by NHS England for this year. The causes included increased demand across primary, secondary, community and mental health services, challenges in recovery of productivity post pandemic, staff vacancies and issues impacting on staff morale.
 - These challenges would continue over the winter months and would be compounded by additional factors such as seasonally driven increases. In addition to targets issued by NHS England a number of requirements had also been issued by all trusts.

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

1. Crawley Borough Council Tree Planting Strategy
2. Crawley Homes Staffing Growth – Part B
3. Five Year Business Plan for Tilgate Park & Nature Centre – Part B

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.42 pm

M L Ayling (Chair)