

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel

Wednesday, 13 September 2023 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T Lunnon (Chair)

M L Ayling, H Hellier, S Piggott and S Pritchard

Officers Present:

Ian Duke

Chief Executive

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interests were made.

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

Councillor Lunnon welcomed the Panel to the first meeting of the Housing Associations Review and provided some background information.

The purpose of the Panel was to seek clarification as to the regulation of social landlords and housing associations. There was a need to scrutinise the current situation and operations with regards to a limited number of housing associations within the town, together with service standards, satisfaction and amount of customer contact received, ideally with witness sessions from various housing associations. It was felt important to explore options to improve the work between the council and various RSLs, resulting in a positive outcome for all parties.

It was noted the OSC had previously received a report ([SHAP/69](#)) containing information on the housing associations operating in Crawley and third-party data was difficult to mandate, particularly as the Council was not the regulator for RPs.

It was discussed at the OSC Training Session and approved at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in June 2023 that the follow up would be beneficial in the format of a 'Spotlight' Scrutiny Review. A Spotlight Review usually takes 2-3 sessions (4 maximum) and involved:

1. Introduction, scoping and identifying witnesses.
2. Witness sessions.
3. Finalising recommendations (or obtaining additional information if required).
4. Finalising recommendations (if not completed in 3).

It would be important for the Panel at end of each meeting to think about what recommendations may be relevant for the final report as it was not advisable to wait until the last meeting and have to review each meeting in infinite detail.

The Chair then asked Ian Duke, Deputy Chief Executive and Lead Officer of the Panel to provide some background information. It was acknowledged that following the OSC meeting, concerns had been raised (particularly around anti-social behaviour, maintenance and customer contact) regarding a limited number of registered providers (RPs). In some instances there was third-party involvement, particularly estate management companies, however it was thought that responsibility and cooperation should be evident to assist partnership working. There were many [RPs](#) within the town, however the council had few contacts, with the exception of formal processes such as NASB, Planning and Environmental Health.

It was recognised that RPs tended to operate on a larger (regional) scale which may result in disparity across areas. The Council operated a choice based lettings scheme so that households on the housing register choose which properties they bid for. An update was requested whether since 2018 ([SHAP/69](#)) there had been a change in landlord preference. Competition across different areas was welcomed and relationships between RPs and the council can be forged through the enabling function and quality checks were in place prior to this collaboration proceeding.

The Regulator of Social Housing regulated registered social housing providers including local authorities and housing associations. The Regulator of Social Housing set [consumer and economic standards](#) which RPs of social housing had to meet. The [Decent Homes Standard](#) was due to be updated in the near future but it was important to note that the [new consumer standards](#) were currently out for consultation and it was intended the revised standards would apply to all RPs with effect from April 2024.

The Panel acknowledged the scrutiny functions were specifically referred to in the Local Government Act; including making recommendations on “*matters which affect the authority’s area or the inhabitants of that area*”. This could be interpreted as: “....*To review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies and partnerships in the district, with a specific obligation on crime and disorder and serious violence duties and invite reports from them by requesting that they address the Committee, and local people, regarding their activities and performance.*” In addition, the Crime and Disorder Act, placed a duty on partners to take into consideration the effects of crime and disorder are adhered to.

It was therefore felt there may be a wider need to invite RPs to a meeting to discuss potential ways of sharing best practice, expertise and learning between organisations to address any of the concerns. Panel members recognised the importance of understanding the processes and systems for each organisation in order to benefit from a constructive exercise resulting in positive outcomes. Furthermore, it may be important to request feedback from all the RPs within the borough and it was noted that this could be undertaken through alternative methods to a witness session if the need arose and be carried out via email. However, that responses may be limited, and the review scope was to focus on those specific RPs together with adding value.

It was noted that Tenancy Strategies also identified key areas that registered providers who have housing stock in Crawley were asked to take into account when formulating their tenancy policies:

- Meeting social obligations as well as regulatory requirements
- The provision of tenancy support services to tenants to prevent homelessness
- Making best use of housing stock to support the Council in meeting housing need
- Ensuring that accessing social housing is equitable for all

As the majority of housing associations operate on a regional basis, their Tenancy Policy would be regionally rather than locally based and as such will need to “have

regard” to the Tenancy Strategies of the range of local authorities across their operating areas. The Council’s current [Tenancy Strategy 2019-2024](#) (report [SHAP/77](#)) were approved in 2019, with work on the new Strategy anticipated to early 2025 for approval November 2015 and it would be important if any recommendations could feed into this.

Panel Members then discussed the draft scoping framework. There was a general view that the scope should include maintenance, particularly in relation to the public realm and the overall environmental appearance, together with general customer satisfaction. With regards to witnesses that may be invited, it was felt that the Panel would benefit from potential witness sessions with Moat Housing Association, Hyde Housing Association, Clarion Housing and Guinness Trust, with the possibility to liaise with others via email. It was acknowledged that the Regulator of Social Housing may provide a valuable insight, along with gaining a council’s perspective from the Head of Strategic Housing and the Head of Crawley Homes in terms of RPs and anti-social behaviour. The Panel requested an overall update since SHAP/69 together with some information around ASB areas, enquiries and general processes. This would assist the Panel to understand the challenges the services face both now and in the future. It was agreed that it was necessary to obtain further information from witnesses connected with the issues.

The Scoping Framework was agreed as set out as an appendix to these minutes.

RESOLVED

1. That evidence gathering interviews be arranged with the Head of Strategic Housing, the Head of Crawley Homes and the Cabinet Member for Housing (witness sessions).
2. That the Scoping Framework was agreed as set out as an appendix to these minutes.
3. That Panel Members identify a clear set of questions to ask representatives attending witness sessions.

3. Future Meetings

With the Scoping Framework agreed, future meetings were agreed as follows (subject to witness attendance):

Thursday 23 November	Head of Strategic Housing, Head of Crawley Homes and Cabinet Member for Housing
Wednesday 7 February	Witness Session
Monday 18 March	Finalise recommendations / witness session if required

Whilst the individuals named above identifies those witnesses anticipated to speak at the specified meeting, this may change subject to availability and, at the discretion of the Chair. Further witnesses may be called in addition or instead of those listed above should they be unavailable.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.14 pm

T Lunnon (Chair)

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Final Scoping Framework

Title of Review: Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel

PART 1: THE REVIEW

Section 1 - Terms of Reference

To seek clarification as to the regulation of social landlords and housing associations. There is a need to scrutinise the current situation and operations with regards to a limited number of housing associations within the town, together with service standards, satisfaction and complaints received, ideally with witness sessions from various housing associations.

It was felt important to explore options to improve the work between the council and various RSLs, resulting in a positive outcome for residents.

Section 2 – Reasons for the Review

At the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in March 2023, clarification was sought as to the regulation of social landlords and housing associations. It was felt it would be beneficial to scrutinise the current situation with regards to a limited number of housing associations within the town, together with service standards, satisfaction and complaints received, ideally with witness sessions from various housing associations.

It was noted the OSC had previously received a report ([SHAP/69](#)) containing information on the housing associations operating in Crawley and third-party data was difficult to mandate, particularly as the Council is not the regulator for RPs.

It was discussed at the OSC Training Session and approved at the Overview and Scrutiny Commission in June 2023 that this follow up would be beneficial in the format of a 'Spotlight' Scrutiny Review. A Spotlight Review usually takes 2-3 sessions (4 maximum) and involves:

1. Introduction, scoping and identifying witnesses.
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4. Finalising recommendations (if not completed in 3).

Section 3 – What will be in scope

Whilst the previous report [SHAP/69](#) identified key points, this Scoping Framework is specific in that the **scrutiny panel should focus on the activities where the council can influence and add value.**

- a) Review report [SHAP/69](#).
- b) Main priorities and issues faced for residents in social housing, in relation to their landlords.
- c) RSL's current targets and achievements in various service areas eg maintenance (and repairs) – especially of the public realm, overall environmental appearance, customer contact, general customer satisfaction, anti-social behaviour.
- d) What influence the council can have.
- e) The openness and approachability of specific RSLs in the borough.

Overall aims –

- a) Improved method of contact.
- b) Reduction in complaints received by council/councillors regarding housing associations.

Agenda Item

Section 4 - What will not be included in the scope (and why)

Potentially this could become a huge review, but it is proposed to keep this review more proportionate and concise by focusing on where it can add most value. Specific cases, actions or decisions taken by officers of the council of housing associations, unless they are related to policy. Anecdotal evidence may be used to inform areas, policies or habits to investigate but specific people are not to be scrutinised and the Panel should aim to avoid assigning blame to individuals.

PART 2: EVIDENCE GATHERING AND PLANNING

Section 5 - Key Documents and Background Information the Panel may find useful for research.

It will be necessary to take into consideration current and proposed policy documents when undertaking this Panel's work to ensure work is in line with Council policies and priorities.

- a) [Housing Associations Operating in Crawley OSC Report - SHAP/69](#)
- b) [Regulatory Standards \(Regulator of Social Housing\)](#)
- c) [Decent Homes Standard: Definition and Guidance for Implementation \(DCLG\)](#)
- d) [New Consumer Standards \(out for consultation\)](#)
- e) [Tenancy Strategy 2019-2024 Report SHAP/77](#) and [Tenancy Strategy 2019-2024](#)
- f) [List of current RPs \(CBC website as of September 2023\)](#)

Section 6 - Witnesses that may be invited

(some initial suggestions listed below – but probably will need to be more focused and selective)

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Name/Position</u>
CBC	Head of Strategic Housing
CBC	Head of Crawley Homes
CBC	Other Councillors may also be invited to provide evidence (including the Cabinet Member for Housing).
External	RSLs operating within the borough – potential witness sessions (Moat Housing Association, Hyde Housing Association, Clarion Housing and Guinness Trust), with the possibility to liaise with others via email.
External	Regulator of Social Housing

Section 7 - Site Visits and Attendance at Events

<u>Location/Event</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Purpose of Visit</u>
Potential visits dependent on issues of concern	TBC	Informal site visits by councillors

Section 8 - Community Engagement Proposals

TBC if required

Agenda Item

PART 3: ADMINISTRATIVE CHECKLIST

Section 9 – Planning the Panel’s Work Programme		
	Date (prov)	Details: (e.g. witnesses, objectives etc.)
Projected start date	Sept 2023	
1 panel meeting	14.9.2023	Background report and scoping framework
2 panel meeting	23.11.2033	
3 panel meeting	7.2.2024	
4 panel meeting – IF REQ	18.3.2024	

Section 10 - Resources and Responsibilities	
Chair of Scrutiny Panel	Cllr Lunnon
Other Members of Scrutiny Panel	Cllrs Ayling, Hellier, Lunnon, Piggott and Pritchard
Lead Officer(s)	Ian Duke
DSO	Heather Girling
Cabinet Member	Cllr Irvine
Head of Service	Head of Strategic Housing

Section 11 - Reporting Arrangements	
Committee/Body	Date (prov.)
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 12 - Approvals		
Details	By whom	Date
Panel agreed	OSC	26 June 2023
Scoping Framework - drafted	Democratic Services	21 July 2023
Scoping Framework - first agreed	Panel	14 September 2023

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