

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 2 September 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

M L Ayling (Chair)

H Hellier (Vice-Chair)

O Adeniyi, I Ashraf, N Hilton, I Khan, K Khan, R A Lanzer, D Ramsay, J Russell and S Sivarajah

Also in Attendance:

Councillors B J Burgess, I T Irvine and M G Jones

Officers Present:

Ian Duke

Chief Executive

Heather Girling

Democratic Services Officer

Amanda Kendall

Head of Crawley Homes

Georgia Leigh

Policy and Engagement Manager- Crawley Homes

Carolin Martlew

Head of Corporate Finance

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor J Hart

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	2024-2025 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1 (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 23 July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Crawley Homes' Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report

Commission Members considered report [CH/207](#) and associated [appendix](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes. The Constitution states that the role and scope of the Commission is to monitor and review the internal and external delivery and performance of services. This includes ensuring that the Council services are achieving both customer satisfaction and value for money. It was important that the Commission scrutinise the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report.

All registered housing providers are required to generate and report Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) as specified by the Regulator. Tenant Satisfaction Measures must be generated using data from a tenant perception survey with pre-set questions to enable comparison between landlords. Additional measures, drawn from management information, must also be provided and have been compiled for consideration at portfolio briefing separately. Tenant Satisfaction Measures are reported to the Regulator as required as part of the Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard. They provide a basis for comparison between providers.

Following the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Crawley Homes and Crawley Homes Policy and Engagement Manager, the following points were expressed:

- All registered housing providers were required to generate and report Tenant Satisfaction Measures (TSM) as specified by the Regulator of Social Housing. The questions were pre-set to enable comparisons between landlords, however additional measures, drawn from management information were also provided and compiled for consideration.
- Recognition that the survey was conducted anonymously, however consent was requested to follow up on any detailed issues and those cases were being re-visited. There were some protective characteristics that can be drawn from the data, and it was acknowledged that satisfaction varied by age.
- Contact preferences were asked in the survey, with most residents preferring to use the telephone and online reporting tending to be used for less complex enquiries. This may change as the planned customer portal was introduced.
- It was acknowledged this was a perception survey and included responses based on expectations. A resident “doorstep” engagement event was subsequently carried out in one neighbourhood, which resulted in constructive responses, but had also established common themes, which included factors such as communal areas, ASB and fly tipping.
- Work was being undertaken with Neighbourhood Services and may involve different service level agreements for particular provisions. Action plans had subsequently been implemented, for instance damp and mould task teams for winter, using different technologies (infrared heating).
- In terms of ASB, there was a balance between residents’ perception, expectation and achieving results, usually as a consequence of the amount of evidence obtained. However it was noted that there was strong partnership working with the police and a flexible ASB team approach.
- Acknowledgement that the new restructure would assist in the prioritisation of repairs to take place within the service, along with post inspection and compliance, as it was important to undertake necessary maintenance to avoid properties falling

into disrepair. Stock condition surveys were underway with the aim to move from responsive repairs to planned maintenance which should result in efficiencies and service improvement.

- Confirmation was provided in terms of benchmarking, Crawley Homes had reasonably good performance when compared with whole sector, strong performance against more suitable peers (Councils). There was potential to join “Housemark” (leading data and insight company for UK housing sector) in order to obtain further data.
- It was noted that this was the first set of results to be produced and it would be beneficial to analyse sector wide.

With the agreement of the Chair, Councillor Burgess also spoke on the item and the Head of Crawley Homes responded that the Regulator of Social Housing would be publishing the results of all the inspections and ratings on the government [website](#).

RESOLVED

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

5. Crawley Homes' Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code

The Commission considered report [CH/208](#) and associated [appendix](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes.

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 (the Act) empowered the Housing Ombudsman to issue a code of practice about the procedures members of the Scheme should have in place for considering complaints. The statutory Code took effect from 1 April 2024 and the Ombudsman believes all landlords must comply with all provisions in the Code as this represents best practice in complaint handling.

In accordance with the Code, providers must publish an annual complaints performance and service improvement report, including the completed self-assessment of compliance with the Code. The service improvement plan brought together a number of separate strands of work and plans, some of which had been in place and evolving since 2022, as well as newer actions arising from more recent complaints and reviews. Once approved, the report must be published on the landlord’s website, along with the governing body’s response to the report to be published alongside this.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Head of Crawley Homes and the Crawley Homes Policy and Engagement Manager, the following comments were expressed:

- It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024. It included additional requirements for scrutiny and oversight and detailed the effects and the ways in which Crawley Homes can liaise with tenants, together with the processes and mechanisms that the service had for addressing and monitoring complaints on a regular basis.
- It was acknowledged that there had been more complaints in the South in terms of repairs compared to the West of the town. Complaints handling performance had dipped last year and had resulted from staffing issues during that period, together with more publicity across the sector from the Housing Ombudsman, particularly around damp and mould, which had also impacted demand for inspections and surveying generally and leaving reduced capacity for complaint handling as a result.

As part of the new restructure within the Responsive Repairs Service there would be a Complaints and Disrepair Manager that would primarily deal with stage 1 complaints, disrepair and assist with stage 2 complaints where appropriate. It was envisaged that the percentage of level one complaints completed within timescale would increase; the senior management team within Crawley Homes was proactively managing performance around this and ensuring that the correct culture was in place that placed compliant handling as a priority.

- Recognition that data was continually being analysed and systems issues were being addressed. This included enhanced training and a need around confidence with getting remedies right at stage 1 (as they underpin what happens with stage 2). It was noted that complaints can be an opportunity to highlight factors in order to provide a good service. Detailed service and action plans and complaints were analysed monthly to ensure continued improvement, along with quarterly reports.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the unreasonable/vexatious complainers and potential trends.
- Confirmation was provided on the classification of formal complaints from the public, as opposed to those received as ‘member enquiries’.
- Details provided on the offer of financial and non-financial compensation. In some cases compensation may be justified, however the evidence and merit of awarding compensation would always be evaluated. A new compensation policy was being drafted which would offer appropriate remedies and compensation in a fair and justified approach.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Action Panel (TLAP) was commended for the scrutinising, input and continued feedback, particularly into the Complaints Service Improvement Plan.

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. Cabinet Member Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing

The Commission noted the update provided by Councillor Irvine and questioned him on a variety of issues relating to the [portfolio](#).

The following topics were discussed:

- With regards to the West of Ifield development, whilst it was not clear how much influence the council had. However should the development proceed in any form it would be hopeful that a large percentage would be allocated for social or affordable housing and that Crawley council would receive nomination rights to some properties, as given the proposed size of the development it would assist the housing waiting list.
- Confirmation that modular housing projects had been delayed due to many factors. There had been extensive consultation with residents and the schemes would require planning consideration.
- It was confirmed that there was now a higher awareness of damp and mould throughout the industry. In addition, the cost of living had an impact on some individuals’ circumstances.
- The Council’s situation was challenging however recently there had been no family placement in B&B for 6 weeks, homelessness had been prevented for 61% of households that have approached the council during Q1. But there was still 2534 people on the housing register which continued to increase, together with a

reduction in available properties for letting. Despite this, there were interesting projects being developed, for instance, it was proposed to allocate 5 flats per year to individuals who presented as homeless, and in return for a temporary tenancy they would receive intensive skilled care (household management).

- The Commission was informed of a launch of an interim report 'Future of Council Housing', supported by many housing authorities across the country to enable authorities to provide more council housing and seek to improve the management of the housing revenue accounts.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission thanked Councillor Irvine for attending and for the informative discussion that had ensued.

7. 2024-2025 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1

The Commission considered report [FIN/665](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance on the quarter 1 budget monitoring, which showed the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets as identified at the end of June 2024. It also set out a summary of the Council's projected outturn revenue and capital spending for the financial year to 31 March 2025. During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Corporate Finance the following comments were expressed:

- Support that the Council was forecast to receive £816k of additional investment interest, due to higher balances than predicted due to slippage in the capital programme and a number of longer term-deals with higher interest rates as a result of more proactive treasury management.
- Concern was expressed for the projected overspend of £575k due to the rateable values for business rates for the new Town Hall/Create Building, particularly in comparison to the rental income. It was confirmed that the rateable values for the unoccupied floors of the Create Building issued by the Valuation Office in the current financial year had come in substantially higher than anticipated. Work and investigations were continuing to explore mitigations.
- It was disappointing to note that the 2024/25 Repayment of PWLB figure had been omitted from the Major Repairs Reserve in the Financial Outturn 2023-2024 (Quarter 4) report. However, it was confirmed that the debt had been paid, and correct figure was provided for transparency.
- Recognition that with regards to New Burdens Funding to reimburse the full costs of Temporary Accommodation incurred for Chagossians, the Council still had yet to receive payment.
- Clarification was provided on the future of the TA budget and the work required to meet the ongoing challenges.

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

1. Crawley Borough Local Plan 2023-2040
2. Tilgate Youth Centre Redevelopment - Approval of Scheme Budget and Authority to Appoint a Contractor – Part B

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.09 pm.

M L Ayling (Chair)