

# Crawley Borough Council

## Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 23 September 2019 at 7.00 pm

### Councillors Present:

Tina Belben (Acting Chair)

M L Ayling, R G Burgess, D Crow, R S Fiveash, G S Jhans, R A Lanzer, T McAleney, A Pendlington and K Sudan

### Also in Attendance:

Councillor I T Irvine, P K Lamb and P C Smith

### Officers Present:

Karen Dodds	Head of Crawley Homes
Ian Duke	Deputy Chief Executive
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Karen Hayes	Head of Corporate Finance
Jess Tamplin	Democratic Services Support Officer

### Apologies for Absence:

Councillor T Rana

## 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	Council Tax Empty Property Premiums (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor K Sudan	Council Tax Empty Property Premiums (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor D Crow	Crawley Homes Additional Staffing Requirements (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Crawley Homes Additional Staffing Requirements (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC

Councillor  
K Sudan

Crawley Homes Additional  
Staffing Requirements  
(Minute 5)

Personal Interest –  
Member of WSCC

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 3 September were approved as a correct record and signed by the Acting Chair.

## 3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

## 4. Council Tax Empty Property Premiums

The Commission considered report [FIN/478](#) with the Leader of the Council and the Head of Corporate Finance. Since April 2013, billing authorities have been able to charge an additional premium of 50% on properties which have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for more than two years. This has meant that the council tax charged is 150% of the normal charge for that property. Legislation has changed to allow councils to increase the premium above the previous 50% limit, with the amount of the premium increasing the longer the property is left empty. The report sought agreement to increase empty homes premiums to ensure that empty homes are encouraged to be occupied. The intention behind the legislation for the charging of premiums is to encourage owners of long term empty properties to bring them back into use in order to increase the supply of housing

During the discussion, the following points were expressed:

- Clarification was sought on the exemptions provided from the premium, particularly for those in care.
- It was felt there was a moral duty to implement, particularly given the current housing situation, as it may incentivise owners to bring the properties back into use.
- Recognition that there were currently inspections that took place in various forms to establish empty establishments.
- Acknowledgement that any application to reduce or waive a premium was governed by legislation.
- Explanation was sought as to responses to other authorities that had increased premiums beyond 50%.
- Acknowledgement that there were no costs to the implementation of the scheme.
- Support for the report and for publicity following Full Council in October.

### RESOLVED

That the Commission agreed to support the recommendations to the Cabinet.

## 5. Crawley Homes Additional Staffing Requirements

The Commission considered report [CH/186](#) with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Head of Crawley Homes. The report sought agreement for additional staffing within Crawley Homes owing to additional work created by Universal Credit, the approach to fire safety and adding further flatted properties with a cleaning requirement.

Councillors made the following comments:

- It was noted that part of recommendation 2.2a within report CH/186 would be amended as follows (changes highlighted in bold): “Approve **four** FTE additional

posts of Housing Officer immediately with the provision of **two** further FTE posts to enable efficient rent collection following changes relating to Universal Credit...”

- Acknowledgement that staff receive full training to assist customers. Officers work to facilitate engagement with those in need to identify and resolve issues, as it was recognised that older debts were more difficult to remedy.
- Recognition that currently were was not a timescale for the full rollout for Universal Credit. It was envisaged that the additional posts would be fulltime posts, however it was acknowledged that there was a natural turnover of the workforce and vacant posts would be reviewed as the roll-out of the scheme progressed.
- Acknowledgement that whilst jobs change, it was important that arrears were kept to a minimum as much as possible.
- Clarification was provided as each neighbourhood patch and the number of properties.
- Further information was obtained as to early intervention together with the sanctions that could be applied for those tenants that did not keep to their agreements.
- Confirmation was provided that the Older Persons Service was focused on those in need and tailored to meeting individual needs.
- It was discussed that it would be beneficial for Councillors to gain further experience from staff ‘first hand’. An option was proposed for an introductory office visit for Councillors.

#### **RESOLVED**

That Commission agreed to support the recommendations to the Cabinet.

### **6. Establishment of and Appointments to Scrutiny Panels**

Following the declaration of a ‘climate emergency’ at Full Council meeting in July 2019, the Commission was recommended to consider the establishment and any nominations received for the ‘Climate Change’ Scrutiny Panel. This Panel would focus on the workings and activities of Crawley Borough Council relating to carbon emissions.

Nominations had been received for the ‘Climate Change Scrutiny Panel’, along with nominations for Chair for Councillors K L Jaggard and G S Jhans.

A vote was taken. Both Councillors Jaggard and Jhans received 5 votes each and as a result the Acting Chair had to use their casting vote.

As a result of the vote, and in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, the Commission confirmed the establishment of the ‘Climate Change Scrutiny Panel’, with the membership of Councillors J Hart, K L Jaggard, G S Jhans, T Lunnon and A Pendlington with Councillor Jaggard as Chair.

### **7. Forward Plan - and Provisional List of Reports for the Commission's following Meetings**

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

#### **25 November 2019**

All the reports listed below for November (with the exception of Three Bridges Improvement Scheme Final Design and Waste & Recycling Contract are Policy Framework Documents)

- Budget Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2019/2020

- Review of Statement of Licensing Policy Gambling Act 2005 (2020-2022)
- Crawley 2035: Crawley Borough Local Plan 2020-2035
- Homelessness Strategy 2019 - 2024
- Tenancy Strategy 2019
- Three Bridges Improvement Scheme Final Design
- Waste & Recycling Contract (provisional referral)

**3 February 2019**

- 2020/2021 Budget and Council Tax
- Treasury Management Strategy 2020-21
- Capital Strategy 2020/2021

**Closure of Meeting**

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Acting Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.04 pm

T Belben  
**Acting Chair**