

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Cabinet

Wednesday, 25 September 2019 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

P K Lamb (Chair)	Leader of the Council
I T Irvine	Cabinet Member for Housing
C J Mullins	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing
P C Smith	Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development and Deputy Leader
G Thomas	Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability

Also in Attendance:

Councillor D Crow

Officers Present:

Natalie Brahma-Pearl	Chief Executive
Chris Pedlow	Democratic Services Manager
Jess Tamplin	Democratic Services Support Officer
Karen Hayes	Head of Corporate Finance
Clem Smith	Head of Economy and Planning

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor B A Smith

1. Disclosures of Interest

The following disclosures of interests were made:

Councillor	Item and Minute	Type and Nature of Disclosure
Councillor D Crow	Crawley Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest - member of Crawley Town Centre Partnership
Councillor P Smith	Crawley Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest - Local Authority Director of the Manor Royal Business Improvement District

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 4 September 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

3. Public Question Time

The Cabinet received a question from Mr Richard Symons from Ifield, in relation to the Homes England housing development plan on land surrounding Ifield. Mr Symons thanked the Cabinet for the opportunity to present his question and asked whether or not the Council supports the plan.

Councillor P K Lamb explained that the Council does not support the application, and that it is currently awaiting review from Horsham District Council's Local Plan as the site falls fully within the Horsham area. It was clarified that neither Crawley Borough Council nor Horsham District Council were in partnership with Homes England regarding the Ifield plan, in spite of a previously released Homes England statement which claimed that both councils were. Councillor Lamb explained that the Council have submitted concerns to Homes England regarding the proposals which have yet to be addressed.

4. Matters referred to the Cabinet and Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

It was confirmed that no matters had been referred to the Cabinet for further consideration.

5. Council Tax Empty Property Premiums

The Cabinet considered report [FIN/478](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The Leader briefed the Cabinet on the report, which was based on national legislative changes that now give billing authorities the ability to amend Council Tax premiums for properties that have been empty for a minimum of two years. It was explained that the recommendations are set in order to incentivise the occupation of empty homes – increasing the number of properties available to residents. The Cabinet was requested to approve, and submit to Full Council, the recommendations applying to both the 2020 and 2021 financial years, as well as to allow waives of the current premium on properties that are being 'actively marketed' (considered on a case-by-case basis).

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission's comments on the report were discussed with the Cabinet following consideration of the matter at its meeting on 23 September 2019. Cabinet members discussed the number of properties currently empty, and sought clarification over those exempt from the premium which members heard was determined by national legislation.

RESOLVED

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Full Council be RECOMMENDED to approves

- a) the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium from 1st April 2020 of 100% in respect of properties empty for between 2 and 5 years, and 200% in respect of properties empty for 5 years or more.
- b) Approves the Council Tax Empty Homes Premium from 1st April 2021 of 100% in respect of properties empty for between 2 and 5 years, 200% in respect of properties empty for between 5 and 10 years, and 300% in respect of properties empty for 10 years or more.
- c) to remove the premium on a property when it is 'actively marketed' if it meets the premium criteria rules.

Reasons for the Recommendation

To incentivise the occupation of empty properties and maximise income in order to ensure that empty homes are encouraged to be occupied and income to the Council is maximised whilst giving consideration to Council Tax payers.

6. Crawley Homes Additional Staffing Requirements

The Committee considered report [CH/186](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes. The report was summarised by the Housing Portfolio Holder who explained that the introduction of Universal Credit has caused an increased workload for Crawley Homes Housing Officers, and that there was a necessity for further posts to be created in order to provide efficient collection of rent. It was noted that a change from the original recommendation (two additional posts with a further four) was to become four additional posts with a further two. Further posts were also required in the Cleaning and Clearance Team due to the number of new flats built and needing cleaning services, as well as a recommendation to increase funding for the Older Persons Services Team in order to offset funding cuts from West Sussex County Council. The Cabinet further noted the bid for additional requirements due to be made through the Budget Advisory Group in the future.

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission's comments on the report were presented to the Cabinet following consideration of the matter at its meeting on 23 September 2019. The Cabinet discussed Universal Credit and the issues surrounding its introduction, including an extended waiting period for receiving benefit payments. Members agreed that the new positions were necessary to assist with offsetting this and offered their empathy to those affected, as well as their appreciation to housing staff who had been under pressure. It was also noted that the Council had previously lost information regarding those in receipt of housing benefits during the national switch to Universal Credit.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- a) Approves 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. To delegate the appointment of the further four posts to the Head of Crawley Homes in consultation with the Head of Finance, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Leader of the Council.
- b) Approves an additional 1 FTE post in the Cleaning and Clearance team to provide cleaning services to new build flats.
- c) Approves an increase in funding of £13,500 for the Older Persons Services Team following the removal of the grant funding from WSCC as outlined in paragraph 6.1.5 of report [CH/186](#)
- d) Notes that a bid will also be made through the Budget Advisory Group for an additional resource to manage increased requirements on fire risk management, and for additional cleaning requirements at Bridgefield House, Three Bridges when this scheme is handed over in 2020. This will be additional to the posts identified in report [CH/186](#)

RECOMMENDATION 2

That the Full Council be RECOMMENDED agree the additional budget of £265,500 per annum for the additional posts required in the 2019/20 budget (pro rata), and additional one off setting up costs as outlined in report [CH/186](#)

Reasons for the Recommendations

- 1) Welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) have meant a significant increase in volume of work within the housing management team and additional Housing Officer posts are required to ensure that rent is collected and the work is manageable within the team.
- 2) New build properties including blocks of flats with requirements for cleaning have been added to the Council's housing stock. With further flats being handed over additional cleaning staff are required to maintain the buildings.
- 3) The Older Persons Services team budget is impacted by a reduction of £70,000 per annum from September 2019 of supported people funding from WSCC and additional funding for one post is required to mitigate the removal of grant funding.
- 4) Crawley Homes staff are currently working on the best way of delivering increased inspections and duties surrounding fire risk assessments following the fire at Grenfell Tower. This will form part of the Budget Advisory Group process but is highlighted to inform members of further revenue implications.

7. Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

The Cabinet considered report [SHAP/79](#) of the Head of Strategic Housing. The Housing Portfolio Holder presented the report, which explained changes made to the Homelessness Code of Guidance in April 2019 that have led the Council to generate a Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy (Appendix A of report SHAP/79). The Code of Guidance now states that a Council must only offer out of borough placements if the placement was made in accordance with a published policy (or if the applicant has specified a preference). Cabinet members expressed concern for treatment of those who become homeless and agreed that out of area placements would only be offered in extenuating circumstances.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- a) Approves the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy (Appendix A of report SHAP/79) for adoption and subsequent publication.
- b) Delegates authority to the Head of Strategic Housing, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to review and make minor amendments to the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy as further changes to legislation and statutory guidance are introduced. (Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).

Reasons for the Recommendations

To fulfil the Council's legal duty to publish a policy regarding the allocation of temporary accommodation.

8. Crawley Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID)

The Cabinet considered report [PES/333](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning, the purpose of which was to provide an update on the Crawley town centre Business Improvement District (BID) proposal. The Cabinet noted the Council's entitlement first to vote on the proposals, and thereafter, its requirements to administer the postal Ballot and collect and transfer the levies to the BID Company. The Cabinet discussed both the BID and the town centre in general, and raised the following points:

- Pride in business relations and the small business grants scheme in the BID
- Success of the Public Space Protection Order established in Manor Royal
- Progress of the town centre redevelopment and of the number of occupied businesses/shops
- Hope for success of the BID in the future
- Acknowledgement of the partnership between Crawley Borough Council and West Sussex County Council in rolling out the Crawley Growth Programme
- Acknowledgement of an increase in the number of PCSOs in the town centre.

Leader of the Opposition Councillor D Crow raised concerns regarding crime in the town centre, asking the Cabinet to take proactive steps to prevent such issues.

All present Cabinet members spoke as part of the discussion.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- a) Notes the intention of the Town Centre Partnership to create a Town Centre BID and the associated timescales leading to a Ballot in November 2019.
- b) Agrees that the Council will vote 'YES' in favour of the BID and by so doing agrees to pay the levy on those rateable hereditaments owned by the Council which are located in the BID area, as listed in Appendix A. The cost to the Council is to be included within future years' budgets if the Ballot is successful.
- c) Subject to recommendation b) above, agrees to instruct the Head of Economy and Planning as the nominated officer representative to cast the 'YES' vote in respect of the Council's eligible hereditaments in the BID boundary area.
- d) Agrees that the Chief Executive as Returning Officer and Ballot holder should hold a Ballot for the Town Centre BID proposal.

That, in the event of a successful vote, the Council:

- e) Agrees to assist the BID Company with cash flow until the levies are collected and to delegate to the Head of Economy and Planning and the Head of Corporate Finance, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, the power to make the necessary arrangements.
- f) Approves that it has the legal responsibility for the collection and enforcement of the BID Levy. These responsibilities will be subject to an Operating Agreement being signed off between the BID Company and the Council, to be agreed by the time of the Ballot in November 2019.
- g) Delegates to the Head of Economy and Planning and the Head of Legal, Democracy and HR, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development, the power to approve and sign the Operating Agreement with the BID Company, together with any other agreements/documents required for the BID.
- h) Delegates to the Head of Economy and Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development the power to take, where appropriate, any direct or incidental action.

Reasons for the Recommendations

To agree to support the creation of the Town Centre BID taking into account the implications to the Council as a ratepayer, service provider and billing authority. The development of a Town Centre Business Improvement District is an aspiration clearly set out in the Council's Town Centre Regeneration Programme, adopted in December 2015 and refreshed then agreed by Cabinet in November 2017.

9. 2019/2020 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1

The Cabinet considered report [FIN/479](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance, which summarised the Council's actual revenue and capital spending for the first quarter to June 2019, and discussed the deviations from the budget. These deviations were identified in the staffing budget, where inaccurate assumptions concerning staff vacancies led to overspending, and in planning, where a reduction in expected applications was seen in light of an uncertain economic climate. It was noted that three major planning applications will be considered in the next quarter, and that as such, a turnaround in the budget is expected. Members identified that these matters will continue to be monitored in the future.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet notes the projected outturn for the year 2019/2020 as summarised in report FIN/479.

Reasons for the Recommendation

To report to Members on the projected outturn for the year compared to the approved budget.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Cabinet concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.31 pm

P K LAMB
Chair