

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 6 September 2021 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

K Khan (Vice-Chair in the Chair)

M L Ayling, R G Burgess, R A Lanzer, S Mullins, A Pendlington and S Piggott

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett, I T Irvine, P K Lamb, C J Mullins, M Morris and M Mwangale

Officers Present:

Ian Duke	Deputy Chief Executive
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Nikki Hargrave	Housing Options Manager (Strategic Housing)
Karen Rham	Neighbourhood Services Manager
Kate Wilson	Head of Community Services
Paul Windust	Chief Accountant

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor T G Belben, A Nawaz and B A Smith

1. Disclosures of Interest and Whipping Declarations

No disclosures or whipping of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 28 June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Vice Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Petition – 'Keep your dog on a lead in Tilgate Park'.

The Commission considered joint report [HCS/30](#) of the Head of Community Services and Petitions Officer.

The report responded to the petition submitted from residents titled 'Keep your dog on a lead in Tilgate Park'. The petition documented the concerns and wished the council

to increase signage and warden patrol around Tilgate lake to ensure dogs were kept on leads while walking around the lake and to implement the enforcement of rules when this was not adhered to:

“We the undersigned petition the council to Increase signage and warden patrol around Tilgate lake to ensure dogs are kept on leads while walking around the lake. To implement enforcement of rules are not adhered too. My dog was attacked while walking around the lake by a dog that was not kept on its lead. The rules are clear on the website, however there isn’t sufficient signage and enforcement of rules for dog owners not adhering to the rules. Therefore increased presence of signage, policing and enforcement is required”

Members were informed of the key areas for consideration and recommendation within report [HCS/30](#). The report outlined the research that had been undertaken following receipt of the petition. Members considered this and the additional information.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing, the Head of Community Services and Neighbourhood Services Manager, Members made the following comments:

- It was acknowledged that the petition referred to Tilgate Park only, however it was hoped Tilgate Park could be a trial for other parks as it was not a problem confined just to one particular area within the town, as the recent dog on dog attacks in Worth Park (which unfortunately resulted in a death of a dog) and that along Worth Way were also mentioned.
- It was felt it was the responsibility of dog owners to keep their dog on a lead and to ensure it was kept under control. Acknowledgement that dogs react differently in various environments and being on a lead would be one option to assist this.
- Dogs were not allowed in the walled garden, nature centre or children’s play area within Tilgate Park. The walled garden and nature centre were routinely staffed making this easier to manage and in general it was felt that the public largely complied with and respected the need to keep dogs out of the play area.
- Disappointment was expressed that the current signage within Tilgate Park had not been successful and the vandalism of signs unacceptable.
- There was acknowledgement that the enforcement options detailed in the report included by-laws, PSPOs and CPNs when officers and the police would have to actually witness the infringement and obtain sufficient evidence. These enforcement options differed to the current Community Warden patrols, which provided a visible presence challenging and encouraging owners of dogs off leads. It was noted that the park covered a huge area and it was felt by some that patrols should take place around the entire park, not just the lake.
- Recognition that as part of a communication plan there could be opportunities to focus on more than one issue. Community Wardens have a variety of work and respond geographically to multiple ASB issues including Tilgate Park. There was a good communications plan for Tilgate Park but this could be strengthened with the dogs on leads issue and it was hoped to work with a ‘Friends of’ group to develop the message.
- An update was provided on the ‘Hound Ground’ in that further work was ongoing but it was anticipated it would reopen in the future.
- It was felt the number of attacks was under reported and the public should be encouraged to report incidents.
- Recognition that the actions needed to be robust and the penalty of keeping a dog on a lead paled into insignificance when compared to a dog attack and injury inflicted. The majority of Commission members voiced a preference for option 2 within the report, expressing support for the Community Warden Patrol enforcement around the park. Whilst enforcement options were discussed at length, it was thought that option 3 may be heavily resource intensive without

resulting in behavioural change and minimum reward in comparison. It was hoped that option 2 may in time be rolled out to other parks. Should the Cabinet support option 2, it was suggested that a review takes place in 6-9 months' time following the implementation to assess its operation.

RESOLVED

That the Commission notes the petition, background report and requests that the views expressed during the debate, are fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

5. 2021/2022 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1

The Commission considered report [FIN/531](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance on the quarter 1 budget monitoring, which set out a summary of the Council's actual revenue and capital spending for the quarters to June 2021 together with the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets.

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

- Recognition that the budget was overspent for this quarter. The majority of the reasons were still Covid related (for example people not signing up to use services following the easing of restrictions, number of planning applications received). The situation would be monitored over the next few months and continued to be reported in future monitoring reports.
- Confirmation was provided that Everyone Active had developed additional advertising campaigns to promote K2 Crawley. There may be additional ways (secondary spend) to encourage attendance at venues.
- There was a query surrounding attendance analysis at K2 Crawley. It was felt that once there was a level of normality, and if then, usage levels had not returned to pre-pandemic levels then further analysis may be required. However currently there was too much uncertainty surrounding attendance levels.
- Acknowledgement that whilst individuals' household income had been affected, leisure facilities would continue to be impacted. There was recognition that Covid had resulted in behavioural change and until there was overriding confidence that Covid would not be a concern, then leisure provision would remain a challenging area but it was hopefully not a long term issue. There was also an impact on other services throughout the town as a result of Coronavirus.
- Recognition that the council gave advice to businesses during and post pandemic as well as working in partnership with the business community and MRBD. It was also hoped that there would be further green development in the future.
- Acknowledgement that the review of essential car users' savings anticipated figure was unlikely to be realised but was based on what would be reasonable.

RESOLVED

That the Commission notes the report and requests that the views expressed during the debate, are fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

6. Tilgate Park Update

The Commission received an update from the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing, the Head of Community Services and the Neighbourhood Services Manager on Tilgate Park, its business plan, impact on the Covid19 pandemic together with how the park,

nature centre and staff have been affected and adapted, together with improvements, changes moving forward, future working and priorities.

- Tilgate Park introduced a 5 year business plan in 2015 where the park was encouraged to generate additional income. This included a 50p incremental charging for the Nature Centre. However from 2020, a decision was taken to introduce a step-change of £6/£5 charge respectively. It was felt the below comparisons justified the increase, however it was important to protect the income and it was hoped in the future to become cost neutral for the entire service.

August comparison		
2018	26,382 visitors	£94,000
2019	23,747 visitors	£98,000
2021	23,187 visitors	£165,000

12 April – 31 August comparison	
2018/19	£305,800
2019/20	£308,700
2020/21	£401,600 *

* opening April 2021 with limited max capacity, pre booking only

- The majority of visitors were from outside Crawley and Nature Centre bookings had increased the use of MyCrawley by 45%.
- Tilgate Park had now established itself as a regional attraction, fairly priced compared to other facilities. It had received the Parkdean, BIAZA Gold and Silver awards together with the TripAdvisor Hall of Fame Travellers' Choice, voted top 10% in the world.
- The play area within the park had recently been renovated using reserves.
- It was acknowledged that much of the work within the park took place surrounding its maintenance of the lake and horticultural within its gardens. Many of the renovated plants would be saved to replant in other areas of the park.
- The Remembrance Garden has been newly created to enable the scattering of a loved one's ashes. There is also the option to dedicate a bench, shrub or tree to someone who has passed. Pet memorials will be introduced shortly.
- Tilgate has since introduced events during the autumn/winter months to ensure the venue has events throughout the year.
- The hound ground required further work but it was anticipated it will reopen in the future.
- The Lakeside café had proven popular and developed following customer feedback.
- Weddings now take place at the park, given the park's unique location and surroundings.
- The car park issues were currently being addressed.
- It was acknowledged that further developments can be addressed sympathetically in the future to enhance the park to its full potential.

Members then raised a number of queries. The issues raised and the key responses included:

- Members expressed their congratulations at achieving international recognition.
- Confirmation that in terms of assets, it was important to look at these as an opportunity basis and evaluate accordingly. The focus currently would be on generating revenue.

- Recognition that car parking machines had posed issues during the year. A new app was being introduced in addition to the machines. Gainsborough playing fields had been used in the past for large events such as the Dragon Boat Race when it can be marshalled and stewarded.
- Acknowledgement that the children's playground renovation had been successful and there was a comment for further seating in and around the site.
- Concerns raised around the lack of pollination and drought resistance planting. It was confirmed that further sustainable, pollinated friendly planting that is drought resistant will be developed at the park
- Recognition that event organisers were encouraged to use different event spaces, playing fields and parks across the town. It was important to have a balance of events to ensure the understanding and sensitivity of residents were managed. Tilgate Park is a large park and draws the crowds.
- Recent events at Goffs Park had been successful and highlighted the use of other parks within the town.
- Officers were thanked for a great deal of work throughout the council during a difficult time over the last 18 months.

RESOLVED

That the Chair thanked the officers for the presentation and for the informative discussions that had ensured. The Commission noted the presentation, with the views expressed being acknowledged and documented by officers.

7. Cabinet Member Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing

The Commission noted the update given by Councillor Mullins and questioned him on a variety of issues relating to his portfolio.

The following topics were discussed:

- The services within the Wellbeing portfolio were non statutory, yet it was acknowledged that they encompassed the wellbeing of the town and included elements of education and physical education for both children and adults.
- Whilst during the pandemic it had been important to keep people safe, there was a recognition that the leisure provision was challenging and there was a need to promote and encourage the use of facilities.
- Community buildings may not have deteriorated throughout the pandemic, although the cleaning routines and high standards would need to be maintained. Playing fields were being gradually improved. It was also noted that outside gyms were now proving popular.
- It was noted there used to be leisure facilities tour as this had been beneficial for the various venues and business aspects. This could be introduced depending on attendance prior to the budget process.

RESOLVED

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

8. 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.

9. **Property Acquisition to Increase the Council's Portfolio of Temporary Accommodation**

Exempt Paragraph 3

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

The Commission considered report SHAP/83 of the Head of Strategic Housing. The report sought approval to purchase a property on the open market to be used for Temporary Accommodation. The purchase will be funded through the approved budget for Temporary Accommodation.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Housing Options Manager, Councillors made the following comments:

- Recognition that the property would assist in the urgent need to increase the portfolio of temporary accommodation owned and managed by the Council to meet the increased demand and ease the reliance on expensive nightly paid accommodation, including out of borough placement.
- Acknowledgement that the detached property would provide an additional 6 units of temporary accommodation. It would be flexible to meet the demands of the service.
- Consultation would take place as part of the planning process.
- General support for the report.

RESOLVED

That the Commission notes the report and requests that the views expressed during the debate, are fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

Re-Admission of the Public

The Vice Chair declared the meeting reopen for consideration of business in public session.

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

27 September 2021

Community Grants Procedure & Outcomes Framework

22 November 2021

Budget Strategy 2022/23 – 2026/27

Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2021-2022

2021/2022 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2

31 January 2022

2022/2023 Budget and Council Tax

Treasury Management Strategy 2022-2023

2021/2022 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 3

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Vice Chair declared the meeting closed at 21.24pm.

**K Khan
Vice Chair**