

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel

Monday, 26 July 2021 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

R A Lanzer (Chair)

M L Ayling, T Lunnon, M Mwangale and D M Peck

Officers Present:

Sue Bader

Asset Manager

Richard Gammie

Senior Asset Surveyor

Karen Hayes

Head of Corporate Finance

Jess Tamplin

Democratic Services Support Officer

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor S Mullins

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P C Smith

Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

1. Disclosures of Interest & Whipping Declarations

No disclosures of interest or whipping declarations were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel held on 23 June 2021 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. General Updates and Information

The following updates were presented to the Panel.

Free Retail Training for Independent Businesses

The Chair gave details of a new free retail training programme to be offered to independent business across West Sussex. The programme, West Sussex Retail Hub, was a project formed by borough and district councils and consisted of pre-

recorded sessions, live events, and resources giving information and advice on running a business. The following modules were on offer:

- Measuring sales, tracking profitability
- Key steps for creating a marketing plan
- The importance of business planning
- Employing staff: an introduction to HR for small businesses
- Using social media for business outcomes
- Card payments and electronic point of sale
- Understanding today's customer
- Creating an exceptional customer experience
- Developing a quality customer experience for the modern independent retailer
- Developing new business models that work effectively and efficiently.

Modules were accessible at each retailer's convenience until 2024. Weekly live Q&A sessions were to be held every Wednesday until 22nd September 2021. All resources were available at www.westsussexretailhub.co.uk.

Actions:

- That details of the West Sussex Retail Hub be sent to current neighbourhood parade shop tenants via email.
- That Panel members publicise the Hub to their ward residents.

Comparisons to Other Local Authorities

Following previous discussions by Panel members, information was presented regarding several key factors in the commercial leases of local authorities to which the Panel had previously drawn comparisons.

The information, as follows, was based on unit advertisements and council policies.

	Rent Rates	Rent Reviews	Repairs
Crawley	Market rent	Upwards only every 5 years	All external and internal inc structure and roof
Dacorum	Market rent (lower rates for some public sector and third sector)	Upwards only every 5 years	All internal and shopfront inc doors and windows
Lewisham	Unknown	5 year leases	All external and internal inc windows
Knowsley	Market rent	Upwards only every five years	All internal and external excl structure of roof, floor, load bearing walls, foundations

Details of Business Grants and Arrears

The Head of Corporate Finance gave the following updates:

- £2.048 million in business grants had been paid to neighbourhood parade shop tenants by the Council since March 2020.
- The current total of arrears owed by parade tenants to the Council was £625,400.

Following a query from a Panel member about the publicising of business grants, it was clarified that tenants had been made aware of grants available to them via email, mailshots, and direct conversation with the Council's Finance team. It was also confirmed that the grants were not restricted for specific purposes; there were guidelines but it was a tenant's choice as to how to spend the money received. Grants were received by tenants in arrears and those without arrears.

The Panel discussed the arrears owed. It was heard that individual plans had been arranged for as many tenants as possible to ensure repayment of arrears at a fair and appropriate rate. Tenants that had not taken up a repayment plan were encouraged to do so to help manage their arrears.

Overview of Possible Recommendation Topics

The Panel discussed the matters raised at previous meetings that were identified as possible topics for future recommendations.

1. The provision of business advice to parade tenants.

The Panel proposed that the Council's Business and Economic Development team be requested to assist in providing support to new and existing tenants regarding the running of their businesses. The support would be focused on the suggestions made by tenants as part of the consultation.

Following a query about Crawley Live magazine, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development confirmed that parade shops are able to advertise in the magazine for the rates set out on the Council's website. The Panel floated a proposal to give each new parade business, upon its opening, a free advert in the magazine. It was also suggested to include a feature in each issue giving details of the shops on each parade respectively.

A further suggestion was made that a 'buddy system' could be set up by the Council for parade tenants to support one another in the running of their businesses. This could be based on use class or location.

2. A recurring questionnaire for parade tenants to provide feedback to the Council regarding their tenancy experience.

Panel members proposed that the questionnaire could be published annually and answers reported back to the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development. It was also suggested that an annual Q&A session could be held in the form of a tenants' forum with officers of the Council. This suggestion could be included in the first questionnaire.

3. A simplification of the wording used in the Council's commercial leases.

Officers informed the Panel that new tenants were informed their lease is legally binding and were recommended to seek legal advice before accepting its terms. The Panel agreed that a plain English dictionary could be included at the beginning of each lease prepared by the Council in order to assist tenants in their understanding of the terms used. It was agreed that this was to be published as soon as was practicable. Panel members also discussed the support offered to tenants with English as a second language.

4. Support for a zero tolerance policy on alcohol consumption at the parades.

The Panel discussed the ways in which alcohol consumption and anti-social behaviour were controlled. It was noted that a Public Space Protection Order relating to alcohol consumption was in place throughout Crawley but it was agreed that enforcement of this could always be improved. Panel members discussed the possibility of working with Community Wardens, PCSOs, and Sussex Police Officers to encourage effective enforcement.

5. Support for a review of the CCTV coverage at the shopping parades.

Panel members discussed the possibility of influencing a review of CCTV at the parades including the cameras' placement and lines of sight, modernisation, effectiveness, and ease of monitoring. It was agreed that the Council's Neighbourhood Services Patch Officers and parade tenants could be consulted as part of the review to enhance the CCTV coverage. The Panel also suggested the installation of more signage warning the public about the presence of CCTV.

Actions:

- That the possible recommendation topics raised as part of the Panel's discussion be carried forward for consideration at its future meetings.

4. Witness Sessions

The Committee was informed that, since the publication of the agenda, the invited witnesses had become unable to attend the meeting.

Actions:

- That the scheduled witness sessions be rearranged to a future Panel meeting.

5. Date of Next Meeting

Panel members considered proposed dates for future meetings of the Panel. It was agreed that the next meeting be scheduled for Wednesday 22 September 2021 at 7.00pm.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.07pm.

R A Lanzer (Chair)