

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 5 September 2022 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T G Belben (Chair)

K Khan (Vice-Chair)

M L Ayling, H Hellier, I T Irvine, R A Lanzer, A Pendlington, S Piggott, S Pritchard, T Rana and S Sivarajah

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett, M G Jones and S Malik

Officers Present:

Siraj Choudhury Head of Governance, People & Performance

Ian Duke Deputy Chief Executive

Richard Gammie Commercial Asset Manager

Heather Girling Democratic Services Officer

Karen Hayes Head of Corporate Finance

Simon Jones Head of Digital and Transformation

Jess Tamplin Democratic Services Officer

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	Crawley BC's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement 2022-2026 (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC –
Councillor R A Lanzer	Crawley BC's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement 2022-2026 (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing
Councillor R A Lanzer	Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 8)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC

Councillor
R A Lanzer

Health and Adult Social Care
Scrutiny Committee (HASC)
(Minute 8)

Personal Interest –
WSCC Cabinet Member for Public
Health & Wellbeing

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 4 July 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the following amendments:

Item 3: Public Question Time - Councillor Irvine commented that the PSPO was a serious decision for the Council as it can potentially lead to an individual being fined (of up to £1000) or a criminal record.

Item 4: Public Spaces Protection Order - Keep your dog on a lead in Tilgate Park: the sentence "Views were expressed that the item should be unwhipped at Full Council, however this was not felt to be a discussion point to comment upon further at the Commission's meeting" be removed from the minutes.

3. Public Question Time

Questioner's Name	Name of Councillor Responding
<p>Ahmad Darvishi, Parade Tenant</p> <p>I have been a Crawley tenant for over 30 years and unfortunately, there have been lots of problems, particularly at Tilgate and Furnace Green. Last December there was an issue following a break in at the shop and also with flooding. Having contacted the Asset Team we were informed to complete the work, which was difficult given the time of year, but the issue is still ongoing. I've sent the documentation to the Council and I have yet to receive any insurance money. I have contacted the insurance department and I have not received any response. There is a lack of communication and support with the Council.</p> <p>Supplementary – I would like to thank Richard Gammie who came and saw the completion of the work. With regards to empty shops these should not be given to fast food outlets, as we have enough of these. Shops should be on a tender basis. Elderly residents require shops to be open on a parade. Please bring back the traditional shops; greengrocers, butchers and charge them less.</p>	<p>Councillor Belben (Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission) -</p> <p>I apologise you do not feel you have not had the support from the Council but we will take your details away and look at this further.</p> <p>Councillor Jones (Leader of the Council) – I am not aware of the individual matters of this case, but I am sure we can look into the matter further and respond to our tenant.</p> <p>Richard Gammie (Commercial Asset Manager) - I am aware of the case and I'm afraid I do not have the latest information, but we will pick up the details separate to this discussion.</p> <p>Richard Gammie (Commercial Asset Manager) – I am happy to look at this if it relates to empty properties and marketing but it does need to be at the correct level of rent.</p> <p>Councillor Irvine (Overview and Scrutiny Commission Member) - I sympathise and agree. My concern would be with empty units at the parades and the decline of the parades as they equate to a large part of the Council's income. Unfortunately some of the traditional</p>

	<p>choices do not exist anymore. Think the Council does its best to ensure the parades are viable.</p> <p>Councillor Hellier (Overview and Scrutiny Commission Member) - Furnace Green parade has two empty units on it and as a result of the empty units the trade has declined.</p> <p>Councillor Lanzer (Overview and Scrutiny Commission Member) - Sometimes a unit is physically empty but has already been let, however the tenant has yet to move in. Empty units cannot be determined by the frontages of the shops. National policy will dictate the use of Post Offices on the parades.</p> <p>Councillor Khan (Overview and Scrutiny Commission Member) - Huge concern when the post office closed in town particularly as the local post offices are important to residents.</p>
<p>Martin Stone, Business Owner Town Centre</p> <p>Firstly I would like to commend the Scrutiny Panel's report. With regards to 15.1a, "Maintain a list of essential/traditional and desirable parade uses to allow consideration of lower offers for essential/traditional trades" and I'm just wondering what that means? Does that mean the Council will be getting the right sort of shops on the parades and would be willing to offer 3-6 months rent-free periods as an incentive for them to take on the shops? In the report it does say, subject to still obtaining a market rent to be decided upon. What other areas would they be willing to support please?</p>	<p>Councillor Lanzer (Overview and Scrutiny Commission Member) -</p> <p>Thank you for your question and for your comments on the report. The market rent point is important but it is an obligation under the 1972 Local Government Act to secure a reasonable return for residents. Some uses will tend to command a higher return than others because they are profitable perhaps hot food takeaways and bookmakers. It is important for the Council to be transparent in its thinking of what trades it would like to see on the parades and the reason behind maintaining a list of trades and that would be something for Cabinet/Cabinet member to develop and it is used in other councils. Some of the uses increasingly reflect the way people live their lives and the return on certain businesses is helpful in terms of maintaining the viability of the neighbourhood parades overall, whilst not compromising the Council's desire to maintain a good balance of trade.</p>

4. **Final Report of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel**

The Commission considered report [OSC/303](#) of the Chair of the Council-owned Neighbourhood Parades Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Lanzer.

The OSC was reminded that the main aims of the Scrutiny Panel were to examine the various roles of Crawley Borough Council's neighbourhood shopping parades, explore how effectively these were being discharged, and to consider any improvements that could be made. Commission members were informed that the Scrutiny Panel's large number recommendations were consciously framed with a whole Council approach, noting that contributions can be made by various departments beyond that responsible for the Property Strategy, and by partner organisations.

As a result of the final report and the discussion Councillor Lanzer (Chair of the Panel), the Head of Corporate Finance, Asset Manager and Democratic Services Officer (JT), the following points were expressed:

- There was general support for the report and the Panel's work. Panel members and officers were thanked for a thorough review and comprehensive report.
- The Commission considered the Panel's recommendations to be practical and offered support for actively encouraging the use of the borough's parades. It was commented that they provided a community hub for the neighbourhood and there was a need to focus on engagement and awareness going forward.
- It was felt disheartening that there had been a low response to the parade tenant section of the Panel's survey but acknowledged that tenants' attendance at the Panel's meetings and witness sessions had been positive and engaging.
- There was support for various points documented within the report including the cleanliness of the parades, safety aspects, local community engagement and the cost of living (ie affordability). It would be beneficial to look at the cost of living in parallel with the cost of services. It was acknowledged that signposting businesses was important to ensure they receive the support and assistance as and when required, particularly to providing information regarding the rent review process.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the maintenance responsibilities as outlined within each lease agreement; most of the responsibilities for building upkeep fell to the tenant.
- It was felt that there was a need to diversify the range of units on the parades as usage had changed over time. It was subjective as to what constituted a '*good range of parade shops*'. Demand for parade units was high and some may appear vacant but were already let. Traditional uses were popular with shoppers and the parades should reflect this however there was a need for balance of necessity and achieving rent rate. Additionally some use classes were more profitable than others and it was acknowledged that use classes under Planning legislation had become streamlined.
- It was recognised that legislation implemented during the pandemic had restricted the measures that the Council as landlord could take to recover owed funds. This legislation was due to fall away in September 2022 and whilst the majority of tenants worked well with the Council to manage their finances, it was noted a large portion of the substantial arrears was owed by a small number of tenants and this was unacceptable.
- Concern was raised regarding some of the Panel's recommendations given the financial pressures on the Council's General Fund and ultimately any proposals would need to be cost-effective. It was however noted that items for the Capital Programme were driven by the need for the upkeep of council assets and environmental obligations and schemes will also be considered that are spend to

save or spend to earn, but that such prioritisation should not preclude the initial consideration of capital projects that could deliver “*social value*”.

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.

5. Crawley BC's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Statement 2022-2026

The Commission considered report [LDS/181](#) of the Head of Governance, People and Performance. The report sought approval for the refreshed and updated Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) approach, including a revised statement and action plan.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Head of Governance, People and Performance, the following comments were made:

- Clarification sought as to the training to be offered for Councillors. It was acknowledged the training programme for officers and Councillors was currently being devised. It was identified that the training would need to be tailored for the range of roles which employees fulfil e.g. some roles are more public facing or work with particular vulnerable groups. Similarly, a specific course will be designed for councillors. This will be a starting point to cover the legal duty, the protected characteristics and to build awareness around this complex and developing field. It was confirmed that training would look to help employees and councillors to understand and identify unconscious biases which might potentially influence behaviour and decision making. External trainers will be considered subject to cost and considering that there is a large staff complement to train.
- Confirmation was provided that no feedback had been received from UNISON.
- Support for the work in Community Services with regards to the outreach work and identifying community champions. It was hoped this would provide better services and reduce barriers to participation, increasing access to health and wellbeing. The key was having EDI in mind when embarking on new projects or significant decisions.
- Concerns were expressed over equality and access when vehicles park on footpaths. It was noted that this was an enforcement issue and that if it was within the Council's powers, it could act. All concerns and incidents should be reported directly to the Head of Community Services.
- Clarification sought as to whether assistance dogs would be permitted within not just the new Town Hall, but also the leased offices, as currently assistance dogs were allowed in the current building. Whilst it was anticipated assistance dogs would be permitted in the Council's area, further discussion would be required for the leased offices. It was also confirmed induction loops were to be fitted in the new Town Hall.

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. Review of Transformation Plan

Commission Members considered report [DCE/13](#) of the Deputy Chief Executive. The Commission has within its function to review the council's transformation programme, measures, and performance information (including budgetary information) together with service reviews.

The Transformation Plan was revised in 2020 with a first review report to OSC in November 2020 and then again in November 2021 - [DCE/09](#), providing an update on progress to the six themes and activities. [DCE/13](#) provides an update to the Commission, identifying those activities that have been delivered sufficiently, where remaining activities are incorporated into service plans as business as usual or likely to carry across to the next iteration of the plan. Much progress had been made and the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the Transformation Plan, in particular in terms of new ways of working, values and behaviours and digital transformation.

The Transformation Plan included:

- Channel Shift – reflected the massive shift to online work, which included how residents wished to interact with the council. There were huge advantages to the council in terms of efficiencies. These were the simple, transactional and information driven activities such as myCrawley which had resulted in 37,998 registrations together with an option for eBilling for Council Tax. Work will continue to capitalise on this approach where possible whilst retaining options for more traditional phone or face to face interactions for those who require this. Just 5% of all traffic through the Contact Centre was now face to face.
- New Ways of Working – The Council continued to focus on how best to use new technology to release staff to work in a more agile way. The most significant project was the migration of the Council's infrastructure to the cloud along with a range of service led projects. The move to the new Town Hall had provided momentum to digitise historic data creating space, improving access to information and modernising working practices. Ultimately these will drive efficiencies and provide enhanced customer access. In addition the mobile working phase 3 project was underway and would see improvements in service areas.
- People Strategy – As the Council's ways of working evolve and change there was a need to review the employment offer and practices to ensure it continued to attract and retain the best workforce and get the most out of the talent the Council has. It was important to create and embed a culture of going forward to be more flexible and adaptable whilst providing support for all staff as the Council continued its journey to transform and develop.
- Service Re-design – This addresses services or functions where it was decided to undertake a review or make changes to improve services or deliver efficiencies. It was important to look at services in an holistic sense. myCrawley deals with multiple transactions and with the addition of links and pages can assist with supporting customers in the future.
- Commercialisation (PIPES model) - By adopting a more commercial mindset the Council is able to respond more flexibly and pragmatically in responding to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). There is a clear need to continue to offer high quality and sustainable services which must operate, as a minimum, as cost neutral. Achieving this at a time where residents and businesses are incurring a raft of increased prices is understandably, extremely sensitive. It does however minimise the need for future reductions in services by developing new ideas, new income streams, greater efficiencies and savings.

- Assets – Within the Council’s current estate there are a range of land and spaces subject to varying levels of use. Several of these offer opportunities for the Council in terms of disposal, development or repurposing. Initially work has focused on Metcalf Way depot and the relocation of its staff and services through a trial of the mobile Patch Teams, thereby freeing up the site for alternative use.

Following the discussion with the Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Digital and Transformation, Councillors raised a number of queries:

- Clarification sought and obtained on the condition and maintenance of the Council’s assets. It was acknowledged that in some case maintenance programmes had reduced due to the pandemic but it was important to contact the relevant departments where deterioration required reporting. Additionally any anti-social behaviour should be reported to the ASB Team or the Police.
- Confirmation that the Council would continue to accept cash payments via the self-pay kiosk. Some residents within the borough insist on paying cash, especially for housing tenancy. It would be a legitimate way for the Council, as a public service, to receive (debt) payment.
- Clarification was provided over the Contact Centre opening hours and call wait (queuing) times, together with potential new IT initiatives being explored as part of the Council’s option to shift demand away from the Contact Centre to provide additional capacity. However, it was noted that these initiatives would only be established once thoroughly tested and if they would generate additional value.
- It was acknowledged that the Council’s ‘report a problem’ page on the website was currently under review. A new page was scheduled for re-launch in the future.
- Explanations were sought and obtained on the details provided within the number of transactions, both internal and external.
- It was acknowledged that the cost of postage had risen since the return to the Town Hall following the pandemic and this was regularly monitored. However it was noted that whilst some efficiencies could be made, there were some items that required to be posted under legislation.

RESOLVED

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

7. Cabinet Member Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Resources

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

The following topics were discussed:

- The mobilisation into the new Town Hall would potentially commence during autumn 2022.
- A trial was underway for mobile Patch Teams within the borough to increase efficiencies. This also assisted in identifying and evaluating alternative use for the Council’s assets, in particular Metcalf Way.
- The IT programme had increased and was also developed its approach. Recently introduced the heightened cyber-security training.
- Governance, People and Performance Team had concentrated on the elections, together with the potential new voted-ID legislation, whilst the Legal Team has installed a new case management system which had resulted in improved efficiencies. A change in both Audit and the new Corporate Performance Team had resulted in an improved ways of working throughout the organisation.
- Confirmation provided that currently no adjustment was being made on the rent levels of the new Town Hall due to the advantage of its design sustainability.

- Clarification sought and obtained on the risk strategy. There were various risk categories and different risk appetites were applied in individual areas of the Council.
- With regards to recruitment and staff vacancies, it was acknowledged that this was a challenge across the Council as there was difficulty in recruitment to various professional roles due to a skill shortage. Work had been carried out in terms of marketing and adapting the current recruitment material.
- It was confirmed that the Council workplaces remained the nominated contracted place of work. However, it was important to offer flexibility and staff were encouraged to be present in the office for a minimum of two days per week for full time employees and one day a week for part time employees. It was queried whether there had been a desire to return to the Town Hall for additional hours/days as a result of the cost of living. However as yet there had not been a change in working patterns.

RESOLVED

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

8. Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

An update was provided from the most recent [HASC](#) meeting. Key items of discussion included:

- The Public Health and Wellbeing Programme was analysed and was making good, steady progress.
- Unfortunately Adult Services was currently experiencing issues with resources.
- It was confirmed that smoking rates within young people had increased and as yet there the reasons were unknown. The Committee asked to be signposted to the [Khan review](#): making smoking obsolete by 2030.
- Following a query by the Commission it was clarified that the review and figures referred just to smoking (and not vaping).

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

OSC 3 Oct

Budget Strategy 2023/24 – 2027/28

2022/2023 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1

Proposals to Introduce New Conservation Areas and Change Existing Conservation Area boundaries

OSC 31 Oct

Climate Change Emergency Action Plan ([OSC Update Report](#))

Environmental Services & Sustainability Cabinet Member Discussion

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 10.09 pm

T G Belben (Chair)