

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 21 November 2022 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

T G Belben (Chair)

K Khan (Vice-Chair)

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

Also in Attendance:

Councillor R D Burrett and M G Jones

Officers Present:

Ian Duke Deputy Chief Executive

Heather Girling Democratic Services Officer

Karen Hayes Head of Corporate Finance

Kareen Plympton Team Leader - Health, Safety and Licensing

Paul Windust Chief Accountant

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor H Hellier and A Pendlington

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	Review of the Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling) Gambling Act 2005 (2023 - 2025) (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Review of the Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling) Gambling Act 2005 (2023 - 2025) (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 31 October 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Review of the Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling) Gambling Act 2005 (2023 - 2025)

The Commission considered report [HCS/050](#) of the Head of Community Services. The report documented the proposed amendments to the Council's revised Statement of Licensing Policy (Gambling) Gambling Act 2005 (2023-2025), which had been generated from responses following an 8 week public consultation exercise.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and the Team Leader Principal for Health, Safety and Licensing Services, the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that there had been support at the previous Licensing Committee for the revised policy.
- Confirmation that the Council was responsible for the issuing of licences for premises that were covered by the Gambling Act 2005. Licences for operators and game types together with controls concerning gambling machines were dealt with directly by the Gambling Commission. It was noted that a number of specific matters must be considered and determined within the policy in order that the provision of betting, gaming and lotteries within the Borough was provided in a manner that promotes the three statutory gambling Licensing Objectives.
- Confirmation was provided that since 2005 no Temporary Use Notices had been issued in relation to Gambling.
- Support for the rate of fees associated with gambling activities, which since September 2022 the Council had set these at the maximum allowed by the Gambling Act 2005.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the consultees including those within the public health sector at West Sussex as well as other organisations. A list of consultees was documented in the report appendix with a full directory available upon request.
- Recognition that the revised policy included new information about problem gambling and links to poor mental health. There were mechanisms in place to support those with tendencies toward unsafe or excessive gambling which included a premises exclusion policy, an individual self-exclusion policy, signage with information about problem gambling and signposting toward sources of support. Additionally, gambling premises were not allowed to include any marketing that might appeal to under 18s.
- It was noted that not all gambling resulted in excess and there was support for the revised policy which allowed the Council to regulate and enforce safer gambling within its legal powers.
- However, concerns were raised about the harmful effects of gambling on children and young people, particularly with the ease of access to online gambling. It was

therefore moved by Councillor T Belben (seconded by Councillor Lanzer) that the Cabinet consider writing to WSCC Education Service to request that anti-gambling be included within the curriculum. A vote was taken and upon being put to the Commission, the proposal was declared as carried.

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, with the additional recommendation above.

5. Budget Strategy Mid-Year Review 2022

The Commission considered report [FIN/596](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report provided an update on the Council's Budget Strategy for 2022.

The Commission received clarification on a number of points during the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant. These included:

- Acknowledgement that there have been several movements since the October Budget Strategy report and that the gap was now showing at £202k, increasing to £398k the following year. The budget shortfall next year would be met from reserves, however in future years there would be a need to look at efficiencies, new income or as a last resort reduction in services.
- Recognition that the major changes included an increased provision for the pay award due to future inflation projections, increased income from garage rents and based current statistics the costs associated in funding homelessness had also increased, although it was hoped that the increase in garage rents did not discourage usage. There were also reduced levels of council tax income and new homes bonus due to water neutrality.
- With regards to Council Tax, it was acknowledged that the Government within the Autumn Statement provided local authorities in England additional flexibility in setting council tax by increasing the referendum limit for increases in council tax to 3% per year from April 2023. Should the Council increase by this amount, it would receive an additional £57k in the next financial year to help meet the gap and with council tax being collected on behalf of three organisations, the Council currently received the lowest proportion to spend on services.
- Recognition that resources and funding had been impacted over the course of the pandemic, and whilst Crawley had established itself as a welcoming and diverse community, concerns about housing costs, together with the implications on public services and S114 Notices were discussed, as well as any potential outcome of the decision to grant British citizenship to people of Chagossian descent. It was felt that addressing matters at national level should attract some national funding. In acknowledging that the financial pressures were going to continue, particularly with regards to homelessness and the TA budget it was requested that Councillors be kept apprised of the financial situation and implications.
- The Settlement would not be known until late December and an all-Member seminar would be scheduled early January to explore the impact of this settlement on future budgets.

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. 2022/2023 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 2

The Commission considered report [FIN/594](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report set out a summary of the Council's actual revenue and capital spending for the quarters to September 2022 together with the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets.

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

- Acknowledgement that for quarter 2 there was a projected variance of £900,000 in the general fund which would lead to a transfer from reserves of £1,352,000. Similarly, recognition that the deficit on the HRA had increased from £174,000 at quarter 1 to £218,000 at quarter 2. Confirmation was provided as to the main variances between the two quarters.
- Recognition that within the capital programme from a budget of £38m there was a projected slippage of £1m into future years across a number of schemes.
- Clarity sought and obtained on the K2 Crawley income projection reduction. It was acknowledged that recovery had been challenging and there was still progress to be made in order to have numbers return to pre-pandemic levels.
- Confirmation was sought as to sub-contractors' sick pay and any budgetary implications.
- Explanation was provided on the usage of the Redhill Data Centre and the decommissioning timescale.
- In the capital programme there was a budget of £60,000 for "Solar PV installations to the Council's operational buildings". It was noted that the Cabinet would be requested to rename this scheme to "Climate Change Initiatives" which would allow the Council to progress projects to meet the Council's Climate Change Agenda and Emergency Action Plan. The Commission unanimously supported this.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and the additional recommendation documented, and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet through the Commission's Comment sheet.

7. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review 2022-2023

The Commission considered report [FIN/593](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report provided an update on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/23.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and Chief Accountant, Councillors made the following comments:

- Acknowledgement that as at 30 September the Council had £139m invested at an average rate of 0.84%. This was lower than comparators but was due to investing for longer terms which had provided the Council better returns in the past. As these deals mature, they would be replaced with investments at higher rates.
- Confirmation sought and obtained on the prudential and treasury indicators, together with the investment performance (Bail-in Exposure).
- Recognition that one of the holdings showed £5m invested with Slough. It was confirmed that one of those deals had matured with the other being imminent and there was never any risk to getting the investment back. (*Head of Corporate*

Finance since confirmed that this repayment was made on 21 November). Any potential further investment would be carefully analysed and considered in future years.

- Noted that local authority transition from financial stability to the issuing of a S114 notice can be rapid. All investments were carefully analysed and considered as best as possible to ensure compliance with the Council's Treasury Management Practices.

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.

8. UK Shared Prosperity Fund

The Commission considered report [DCE/14](#) of the Deputy Chief Executive. The report sought approval to receive, manage and distribute the Crawley allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and Deputy Chief Executive, Councillors made the following comments:

- UKSPF formed part of the Government's Levelling Up Agenda with Crawley being offered £1m, to be spent over three years (£150k in 2022/23) from £2.6billion funding.
- Recognition that the framework was wide but needed to follow a set of priorities and guidance from Government; missions, interventions and outcomes which must be specific to the town's local needs.
- Acknowledgement that the proposal was evidence-based and focused on disparities and inequalities within the borough, using Local Super Output Area data, identifying three priority areas as Broadfield, Bewbush and West Green. The proposal was to use the Year 1 funding to undertake engagement sessions with key stakeholders from statutory, voluntary, community and business sectors to identify key needs and barriers, to understand what was already happening and to inform potential areas of focus to be delivered in Years 2 (design phase) and 3 (deployment).
- It was noted that the proposed approach recognised the impact of the cost-of-living crisis by suggesting using Year 1 funding to increase the capacity of the voluntary sector to supporting residents with fuel poverty, debt management and access to food. It was hoped there may be flexibility in the funding profile.
- Confirmation that whilst oversight of the programme would be through a sub-group of the Town's Deal Board, the Council would be the accountable body, with the responsibilities and risks that this status entails. Suitable and proportionate governance arrangements would need to be in place to safeguard the Council's interests whilst ensuring delivery of the programme and it was anticipated that an internal steering group would be established comprising of Cabinet members and Ward Councillors.
- Support for the proposal but recognition that the funding was not sustainable and the suggested interventions were intended to achieve the greatest impact locally.
- Clarity was sought as to the funding calculation for the proposed 18-month post to manage the administration of the programme.

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.

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

At the time of meeting, there were no items on the Forthcoming Decision List for 11 January Cabinet. The Commission currently has the following items scheduled:

OSC 9 Jan 2023

Non-Cabinet Items -

1. Safer Crawley Partnership Annual Review and Future Priorities
2. Cabinet Member Discussion – Cabinet Member for Public Protection & Community Engagement

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.04 pm

T G Belben (Chair)