

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 6 March 2023 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:

Councillors S Buck, B J Burgess, R D Burrett, G S Jhans and M G Jones

Officers Present:

Ian Duke	Deputy Chief Executive
Heather Girling	Democratic Services Officer
Amanda Kendall	Head of Crawley Homes
Diana Maughan	Head of Strategic Housing
Nigel Sheehan	Head of Projects and Commercial Services

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 30 January 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Tenancy Policy Crawley Homes

The Commission considered report [CH/199](#) with the Cabinet Member for Housing, Head of Crawley Homes and Head of Strategic Housing. The report sought approval for the amended Tenancy Policy.

During the discussion the following comments were made:

- Recognition that from 1 April 2023 all new Council tenants would be offered secure periodic tenancies. Existing flexible tenants would be offered a new secure

periodic tenancy to replace their flexible tenancy, the grant of these new tenancies to take place over a two year period commencing 1 April 2023. It was confirmed that introductory flexible tenancies would be phased out using the provisions of section 103 of the Housing Act 1985. This was a prescribed process to be followed should the policy be approved.

- It was noted the phase out was resource intensive and a 2 year period offered stability during the transition and would not require additional finances to administer. The phasing out process of introductory flexible tenancies was discussed in detail together with clarification provided on the communication methods and publicity required for tenants including letters, social media, and newsletters.
- Recognition that the Council has had limited success to date creating opportunities for best use of stock through the review process at the end of the tenancy fixed term. Only a small percentage (less than 30%) of the Council's stock has been let on a flexible tenancy and there was a limited number of those tenancies that have been subject to review to date.
- Acknowledgement flexible tenancies presented the Council with a number of difficulties and/or challenges associated with ongoing management. However, despite the number of management challenges there were also benefits to the Council of offering flexible tenancies, including the opportunity of rightsizing households at the end of the fixed term although such outcomes had been limited to date but over the longer term this pattern could change.
- Confirmation that downsizing can be difficult to achieve other than through negotiation or incentive and further details on the incentive scheme were provided. Opportunities for financial incentives together with other options (such as property condition and repair) were being investigated as it was important to enable movement within the housing register. Additional information was provided with regards to under-occupation, mutual exchange, and the potential for lodgers.
- Recognition that whilst benchmarking with other local authorities had not taken place directly it was observed that other landlords had taken similar decision routes.

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. Cabinet Member Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing

The Commission noted the update given by Councillor Buck and questioned her on a variety of issues relating to the [portfolio](#). The following topics were discussed:

- The past year had been challenging across the housing service, particularly with regards to costs of homelessness and temporary accommodation. It was noted that in terms of the financial pressures should the costs not be sustainable in future years, there would be a need to look at efficiencies, new income or as a last resort reduction in services. The Council had been requested to take part in a high housing demand case study and it was felt this would be beneficial in highlighting the current housing situation within the borough.
- The achievements were also recognised such as housing developments, the new housing management system, Crawley Homes retrofit initiatives, acquisitions for land/dwellings and the Temporary Accommodation budget, which would provide the flexibility to acquire properties on the market for either general needs or temporary accommodation purposes.

- Recognition that the number of responsive repairs had increased, particularly due to damp and mould queries. The strategy and processes for dealing with damp and mould cases were discussed in detail, including redefined triage, communications and repair.
- The first point of contact for complaints was with the landlord, whether this is a housing association or the council. The council has its own housing stock and it was pleasing that the level of formal complaints was low compared to the stock size, less than 2%. The [Social Housing White Paper](#) would strengthen measures across all social landlords, establish new regulation and a strengthening Housing Ombudsman. It was also noted the Audit Committee received updates on housing fraud and potential for properties being recovered.
- Acknowledgement that land supply opportunities were reducing and other options were being investigated. The 'duty to co-operate' arrangements continued to be included in the Council's Corporate Plan to work with neighbouring authorities in the spirit of partnership to deliver housing to meet Crawley's needs.
- Further information was provided on the decision to grant British citizenship to people of Chagossian descent and potential impact on housing costs. Whilst applications had been received, currently there was minimal information on the resultant pressures and impact for the town's housing.
- Clarification was sought as to the regulation of social landlords and housing associations. It was felt it would be beneficial to scrutinise the current situation with regards to housing associations within the town, together with service standards, satisfaction and complaints received, ideally with witness sessions from various housing associations. It was noted the OSC had previously received a report ([SHAP/69](#)) containing information on the housing associations operating in Crawley and third-party data was difficult to mandate. It was therefore proposed by Councillor Belben (seconded by Councillor Pritchard) that the OSC receive a follow up report on the current situation and operations of the housing associations within the town. Upon being put to the Commission, the proposal was declared as carried.
- The Housing teams were praised for their continued hard work throughout a challenging time.

RESOLVED

That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission thanked Councillor Buck for attending and for the informative discussion that had ensued. It was agreed that a follow up report on [SHAP/69](#) be received by the Commission.

6. 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.

7. Waste and Recycling Contract Extension

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 HPS/34 of the Head of Major Projects and Commercial Services. The report requested approval to extend the contract to the waste and recycling service.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Sustainability and Head of Major Projects and Commercial Services, Councillors made the following comments:

- Acknowledgement that the proposal enabled the Council the continuity of the waste and recycling service and would ensure the waste vehicle fleet was operating efficiently and fit for purpose. The procurement of a new waste vehicle fleet with a view to new vehicles coming into operation at the beginning of the extension period in February 2024 would assist in maintaining the delivery of service benefits to residents.
- Recognition that the arrangement enabled the Council to assess options for making amendments to the local waste collection arrangements in response to the National Waste Strategy which the Government had indicated would be released in the 'near future'. The Council's target to net zero was highlighted and it would be important to consider the environmental factors and any impact.
- Support for a further report to OSC once the National Waste Strategy was known indicating proposals for the Council's collection regime.
- Confirmation that an options analysis had been considered as part of the vehicle fleet and was reference within the report. However, clarification was sought about the specifics documented within the proposals. It was moved by Councillor Pritchard (seconded by Councillor Ayling) that the specific options analysis be compiled and sent to Cabinet for its consideration. 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.

Re-Admission of the Public

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

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

The Commission confirmed the following reports:

26 June 2023:

1. Treasury Management Outturn 2022-2023
2. Financial Outturn 2022-2023 (Quarter 4)
3. Leisure Contract - PART B

The OSC is also due to receive an update on K2 Crawley together with the Cabinet Member for Wellbeing portfolio discussion in June.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 9.29 pm

T G Belben (Chair)