

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Monday, 25 September 2023 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

M L Ayling (Chair)

H Hellier (Vice-Chair)

I Ashraf, K Khan, R A Lanzer, T Lunnon, J Millar-Smith, S Raja and J Russell

Also in Attendance:

Councillor I T Irvine and M G Jones

Officers Present:

Russell Allison Housing Enabling and Development Manager

Vicki Basley Chief Accountant

Ian Duke Chief Executive

Heather Girling Democratic Services Officer

Amanda Kendall Head of Crawley Homes

Carolin Martlew Head of Corporate Finance

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor A Pendlington

Absent:

Councillor S Piggott

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	2023/2024 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1 (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	2023/2024 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1 (Minute 4)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member for Public Health & Wellbeing

Councillor R A Lanzer	Proposed Land Disposal of St Catherine's Hospice Site (Minute 6)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Proposed Land Disposal of St Catherine's Hospice Site (Minute 6)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member of Public Health & Wellbeing
Councillor R A Lanzer	Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor R A Lanzer	Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 9)	Personal Interest – WSCC Cabinet Member of Public Health & Wellbeing

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 4 September 2023 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. 2023/2024 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1

The Commission considered report [FIN/633](#) 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 quarter to June 2023 together with the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets.

- Recognition that there was a projected overspend in year, following the impact of the pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, demands on services including Homelessness, reduced income and inflation factors. It was commented that the situation was not sustainable but would be consistently monitored and continued to be reported in future monitoring reports as well as the Budget Strategy.
- Confirmation was provided on the latest position regarding New Burdens funding, together with further information on the work currently being undertaken following the decision to grant British citizenship to people of Chagossian descent, the resultant pressures and potential impact for the town's housing.
- Clarification sought and obtained on the costings on various elements for the new town hall.
- Explanation sought as to the pay award offer, the additional cost projected for the General Fund together with the vacancy provisions documented within the report. *(The Head of Corporate Finance subsequently confirmed that the correct figure was £280k as quoted in appendix 1(ii)).*
- It was noted that the General Fund balance would be close to the recommended minimum of £3m by the end of the financial year if no corrective action was taken.
- Recognition of the pressures and concerns within Homelessness as the service continued to see sustained pressures in all forms of temporary accommodation. It was noted that the service proactively sought suitable temporary accommodation (and it was difficult when this did not materialise), in order to minimise out of borough placements and nightly paid accommodation. It was noted that there were financial, resource and letting benefits resulting from an efficient turnaround of void properties.

- Acknowledgement that the Decarbonisation Fund was being deployed on a ‘fabric first’ approach on a defined list of properties.

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. 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.

6. Proposed Land Disposal of St Catherine's Hospice Site

Exempt Paragraph 3

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

The Commission considered report SHAP/88 of the Head of Strategic Housing Services. The report sought to proceed with the disposal of the Council-owned land at Malthouse Road, and to lift the Restriction on Title on part of the site that is owned by the Hospice, in collaboration with St Catherine’s Hospice surrendering their lease on the Council-owned land and the disposal of the land in their control, to achieve the proposal as detailed. The proposal aims to preserve the legacy of this site and to achieve significant social value in the continued provision of care and support, that is inclusive of on-site affordable housing.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Housing Enabling & Development Manager, the following comments were made:

- Acknowledgement that the proposal aimed to preserve the legacy of this site and to achieve significant social value in the continued provision of care and support, which was inclusive of on-site affordable housing.
- Recognition that as part-landowner, the Council had restricted the future use of the assembled site for the continued provision of a care facility or to provide sheltered accommodation, and the market had been assessed accordingly.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the financial details and options provided within the report.
- General support for the report as it was recognised that the site carried a sentimental element and therefore it was paramount that any interests retained and represented the sensitive usage of the site, particularly for the ongoing benefit of Crawley.

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.

7. Future Acquisitions for Affordable Housing Delivery

Exempt Paragraph 3

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

The Commission considered report CH/201 of the Head of Crawley Homes. The report sought approval to acquire affordable housing opportunities from the market, to be funded from the HRA Acquisitions Budget for Crawley Homes ownership.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Housing Enabling & Development Manager, the following comments were made:

- Recognition that it would allow officers to explore opportunities and viable options from across the market in different forms and to proceed when appropriate, following the necessary consultation.
- Acknowledgement that the options proposed had significant potential to contribute towards addressing Crawley's housing needs and would ease the reliance on expensive nightly paid accommodation.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the financial details and the various options documented within the report.
- Confirmation provided on the recommendations that they were in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

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.

Re-Admission of the Public

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

8. Cabinet Member Discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing

The Commission noted the update given by Councillor Irvine and questioned him 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. However, contracts were currently exchanging on sites and modular schemes were progressing which were important in assisting to reduce temporary accommodation and reduce nightly paid accommodation.
- It was important to look at acquisition opportunities ongoing, and the Council had acquired properties as well as continuing with a new build programme. The ability to take forward market acquisitions allowed flexibility to meet demand for either general needs or temporary accommodation as opportunities arose.
- Acknowledgement that the Council had operated an Under Occupation Incentive Scheme for a long time, which offered a financial incentive to tenants when they moved to a smaller size property and the Housing Allocation Policy gave additional priority to tenants wishing to downsize. Work was currently taking place to assess various options and effectiveness.
- Recognition that the disrepair of voids was a concern and there was strong support for efficient management and turnaround of properties.
- 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.

- Clarification was sought as to the responsibility of repairs and the Regulator of Social Housing would deem the council overall responsible as landlord. It was recognised that the repairs were also contracted and this together with the lettings process was carefully administered to manage residents' expectations.

RESOLVED

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

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

An update was provided from the most recent HASC meeting which took place on 15 September. Key items of discussion included:

- Quarter 1 Quarterly Performance and Resources Report
There were various measures discussed including Adults Services and Public Health. In the first quarter, the measures relevant to HASC reported:

Adult Services

12.5% (4 measures) as 'Green'
37.5% (2 measures) as 'Amber'
50% (2 measures) as 'Red'

Public Health

42.86% (3 measures) as 'Green'
28.57% (2 measures) as 'Amber'
28.57% (2 measures) as 'Red'

The measures highlighted in 'red' were discussed at length by the committee.

- Care Quality Commission Assurance – WSCC Self-Assessment for the delivery of Adult Social Care
The committee reviewed the self-assessment, which had been prepared against nine quality statements, mapped across the four themes of working with people providing support; ensuring safety; and leadership, using the CQCs draft assurance framework.

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

There were currently no items heading to the Provisional Cabinet on 1 November 2023. However, the OSC was due to receive at its meeting on 30 October 2023 the following:

1. Review of the Transformation Plan
2. Cabinet Member discussion with Cabinet member for Resources

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.39 pm

M L Ayling (Chair)

