

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Cabinet

Wednesday, 13 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

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|-------------------|---|
| M G Jones (Chair) | Leader of the Council |
| I T Irvine | Cabinet Member for Housing |
| Y Khan | Cabinet Member for Public Protection |
| C J Mullins | Cabinet Member for Leisure and Wellbeing |
| S Mullins | Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Culture |
| A Nawaz | Deputy Leader of the Council & Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development |
| B Noyce | Cabinet Member for Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change |
| T Rana | Cabinet Member for Resources |

Also in Attendance:

Councillor M L Ayling and D Crow

Officers Present:

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|--------------|------------------------------|
| Ian Duke | Chief Executive |
| Chris Pedlow | Democracy & Data Manager |
| Clem Smith | Head of Economy and Planning |

Apologies for Absence:

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| Siraj Choudhury | Head of Governance, People & Performance |
| Carolin Martlew | Head of Corporate Finance |

1. Disclosures of Interest

The following disclosures of interests were made:

| Councillor | Item and Minute | Type and Nature of Disclosure |
|------------------|--|---|
| Councillor Nawaz | Enhanced Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme (Minute 6) | Disclosable Pecuniary Interest – As he rents an unit on a Council's own neighbourhood parade. |

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 31 January 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

3. Public Question Time

There were no questions from the public.

4. Matters referred to the Cabinet and Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

It was confirmed that no matters had been referred to the Cabinet for further consideration.

5. Second Home Council Tax Premium

The Leader of the Council presented report [FIN/648](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act came into force on 26 October 2023. The Act allows Council's to charge higher Council Tax on properties that are defined as long term empty homes and properties that are only occupied occasionally (second homes). The additional charge is intended to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and could boost the supply of properties in the borough.

Councillor Ayling presented the Overview and Scrutiny Commission's comments on the report to the Cabinet following consideration of the matter at its meeting on [11 March 2024](#), which included:

- Noting it was proposed to introduce a 100% premium on empty homes after 1 year instead of 2 years and to also introduce a second homes premium of 100% both with effect from 1 April 2025.
- The additional charge was intended to encourage owners to bring properties back into use and could boost the supply of properties in the borough.
- Clarification was sought and obtained regarding the penalties that would exist for any potentially fraudulent claims. It was recognised that the Council had a variety of information available to assist in fraud prevention.

Councillor Crow was invited to speak on the item, and in doing made a number of comments that included he was of the view that the proposed approach was the right way forward for dealing with the empty properties.

Councillors Irvine, C Mullins, Noyce, S Mullins and Rana, all spoke in support of the recommendation as part of the discussion on the report.

RESOLVED

That Full Council be recommended to:

- a) approve a Premium of 100% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) after 1 year, instead of two years from 1 April 2025;

- b) approve the application of a premium for dwellings Occupied Periodically (Second Homes) charged at 100% (twice the current Council Tax Amount) from 1 April 2025;
- c) delegate authority to the Head of Corporate Finance (Section 151 Officer) to implement this Council's policy on premiums in line with statute and any subsequent guidance issued by the Secretary of State following the outcome of the consultation (Appendix A of report FIN/648) which recommends exceptions to the second homes premium in certain circumstances.

Reasons for the Recommendations

The Council declared a housing emergency at the Full Council meeting on 21 February 2024. The aim of introducing a council tax premium on long term empty homes and second homes is to reduce the number of empty homes within the Borough and to encourage the use of premises as main residences by local residents rather than second homes.

6. Enhanced Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme

Councillor Nawaz had an interest for this item, so left the room and took no part in the debate.

The Leader presented report [PES/455](#) of the Head of Economy and Planning. The report included proposals to launch an enhanced Retail / Shop Front improvement grants programme. Local independent retailers / small businesses will be able to apply for a grant in order to boost the appearance of their retail unit premises and / or their business operation in Crawley town centre retail units or in one of Crawley's neighbourhood parades. The grants programme fit with the "Town Centre Renewal" strategic priority of the Crawley "One Town" Economic Recovery Plan 2022-2037" in support of the development of a "dynamic business growth" hub in the Town Centre. The Economic Recovery Plan was consulted on in spring 2021 and adopted as a policy by the Council in November 2021.

Councillor Crow was invited to speak on the item and made a number of comments that included recording his support for the scheme and the related criteria.

Councillors Irvine, Rana, S Mullins and Y Khan all spoke as part of the discussion on the report. It was confirmed to the Cabinet, following a request for clarification, that the Improvement Programme, would be available to any independent shops and retail units such as pharmacies, include those on non-Council owned parades as long as they meet the proposed criteria.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- a) approves the relaunch of the previously named Retail Improvement Grant Scheme as the Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme and the assessment process as set out in section 5.1 of this report.

- b) allocates £70,000 of high street improvement funding from the government to the relaunched Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme and to combine that funding with £58,000 of residual monies from the West Sussex Business Rates Pool to establish the Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme.
- c) delegates authority to the Head of Economy and Planning, in consultation with the appropriate Cabinet Member, to review and make minor amendments to the Shop Front and High Street improvement Programme as further changes to legislation are introduced or following any review. (Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).
- d) requests that the Head of Governance, People & Performance to amend the Council's Constitution to reflect any minor changes arising from the decision.

Reasons for the Recommendations

To strengthen the ability for the relaunched Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme to support the growth of independent retailers and small businesses in Crawley by improving the attractiveness and relevance of the programme to the needs of those businesses.

To enable the relaunched Shop Front and High Street Improvement Programme to strengthen the visual appearance of Crawley's neighbourhood parades and parts of Crawley town centre in order to enhance footfall and economic vibrancy.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Cabinet concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.41 pm

M G JONES
Chair