

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Tuesday, 23 July 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

M L Ayling (Chair)

H Hellier (Vice-Chair)

O Adeniyi, E Barrott, N Hilton, G S Jhans, I Khan, K Khan, R A Lanzer, D Ramsay and J Russell

Also in Attendance:

Councillors I T Irvine, M G Jones and T Lunnon

Officers Present:

Russell Allison Housing Enabling and Development Manager

Vicki Basley Chief Accountant

Heather Girling Democratic Services Officer

Carolyn Martlew Head of Corporate Finance

Chris Page Deputy Chief Executive

Apologies for Absence:

Councillor I Ashraf

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	Financial Outturn 2023-2024: Budget Monitoring-Quarter 4 (Minute 5)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC
Councillor H Hellier	Health & Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – NHS Public Governor
Councillor R A Lanzer	Health & Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC) (Minute 7)	Personal Interest – Member of WSCC

Councillor
R A Lanzer

Health & Adult Social Care
Scrutiny Committee (HASC)
(Minute 7)

Personal Interest –
WSCC Cabinet Member for Health
& Wellbeing

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 3 June 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. Public Question Time

No questions from the public were asked.

4. Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel Final Report

The Commission considered report [OSC/320](#) of the Chair of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel. A ‘spotlight’ Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel was established in June 2023 to seek clarification 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 a limited number of housing associations within the town, together with service standards, satisfaction and complaints received, ideally with witness sessions from various housing associations. It was important to explore options to improve the work between the Council and various registered social landlords (RSLs), resulting in a positive outcome for residents.

Following discussions with the Chair of the Panel, Councillor Lunnon, the Commission raised the following comments:

- Confirmation that the Panel’s scope had included issues faced by residents including maintenance (and repairs), overall environmental appearance, customer contact/satisfaction as well as anti-social behaviour (ASB). The ASB Policy for each registered provider operating in Crawley was documented on each of their websites and had been available following the Panel’s November [meeting](#).
- There had been challenges for the repairs service within Crawley brought about through the age of stock, cost of materials, supply issues as well as the damp and mould concerns. These had been noted throughout the sector, both from Crawley Homes and the Guinness Partnership.
- Confirmation sought and obtained as to whether investigation had taken place with sheltered housing schemes. It was noted that Councillors had been surveyed at the commencement of the review seeking immediate concerns but as a result sheltered schemes had not specifically been included in the scope.
- The Commission acknowledged that the responsibility of governing and regulating registered providers lay with the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH). However it also recognised the lack of response from some registered providers to attend the Panel’s meetings, and therefore there was support for requesting further scrutiny powers. It was queried if other Councils were in a similar position, but it was recognised that the Council was a stock holding authority, owning and managing approximately three quarters of all social rented housing in the Borough. The remaining quarter was owned and managed by registered providers.
- Registered Providers play a critical role in the delivery of social housing and meeting local housing need and it was acknowledged the strong partnership working in place between the Council and the number of registered providers operating successfully in the town. The current list of registered providers and number of properties was available on the Council’s [website](#).

- The recommendation to consider establishing regular meetings with partners and share best practice was welcomed. (Engagement with tenants was already undertaken within Crawley Homes).
- Acknowledgement that the factor most heavily influencing tenants during the bidding process (along with the size of the property and any adaptations needed) was the area in which the property was situated. The majority of applicants placed less importance on the landlord, or on the amount of rent and more on the area in which they wanted to live.
- Confirmation that the OSC would receive regular publication of the Crawley tenant satisfaction measures (TSM) surveys with the first report being presented at the meeting on 2 September 2024.
- Overall support for the report and the Commission thanked the Panel for its work.

RESOLVED

That the Commission noted the report and requested that the views expressed during the debate, were fed back to the Cabinet as an appendix to the main Cabinet report for its consideration at the meeting on 4 September 2024.

5. Financial Outturn 2023-2024: Budget Monitoring - Quarter 4

The Commission considered report [FIN/658](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance on the quarter 4 budget monitoring, which set out a summary of the Council's outturn for the year for both revenue and capital spending for the financial year 2023/24. It identified the main variations from the approved spending levels and any potential impact on future budgets.

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

- Clarification was sought and obtained on the rising cost of repairs. High inflation, construction costs and an unprecedented demand were contributory factors. It was recognised that there was now a higher awareness of damp and mould throughout the industry. Prioritisation of repairs had taken place within the service, but it was important to undertake necessary maintenance to avoid properties falling into disrepair. Stock conditioning surveys were underway with the aim to move from responsive repairs to planned maintenance which should result in efficiencies.
- Confirmation provided on the funding available from the Better Care Fund.
- Clarification was sought and obtained with regards to the addition of the Senior Project Manager within the Built Environment Team, together with the demand for the delivery of capital projects.
- Acknowledgement that the homelessness and temporary accommodation pressures continued to rise and there were many contributing factors including the unaffordability of home ownership, shrinking private rented sector along with higher interest rates, Housing Benefit Subsidy (Local Housing Allowance had been frozen since 2011), the reduction of council and other social housing to meet demand. Temporary accommodation was expensive, and it was difficult to meet current levels of demand with existing stock required. There was also a shortage of temporary and nightly paid accommodation driving up prices. It was noted households in nightly paid rose from 206 in April 2023, to a peak of 280 in December 2023.

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. Treasury Management Outturn 2023 – 2024

The Commission considered report [FIN/659](#) with the Leader of the Council, Head of Corporate Finance and the Chief Accountant. The CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management recommends that Councillors be updated on treasury management activities regularly and the report ensured the Council was implementing best practice in accordance with the Code. The report provided details of the outturn position for treasury activities and highlighted compliance with the Council's policies previously approved by Councillors.

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

- Noted that the authorised limit for external borrowing set by the Council was exceeded for a short period during Q4 of 2023/24 and was now back within the set limit. The Commission was informed that the reason for exceeding the limit was a dip in short term cash flow which was met through short term loans from other local authorities. Since the operational boundary was a management tool for in-year monitoring it was not deemed significant if the boundary was breached on occasions due to variations in cash flow, and this was not counted as a compliance failure.
- Recognition that the Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for 2024/25 had since been reviewed with the assistance of the Council's treasury advisors and subsequently increased.
- Confirmation sought and obtained on the detailed funding available within the Strategy, particularly the maturity and interest rates, which would be further updated in Q1.
- Recognition that non treasury investments/commercial properties (excluding town hall) had achieved a rate of return of 8.8%.

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. Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee (HASC)

An update was provided from the most recent HASC meeting. Key items of discussion included:

- End of March 2024 (Quarter 4) Performance and Resources Report
 - o Information was provided on the key performance measures as detailed in the [report](#), specifically those key performance indicators relating to Adult Services and Public Health.
- Forward Programme of Key Decisions
 - o Contract Arrangements - Nursing Dementia Residential Care Beds
 - o Contract Arrangements - Hospital Discharge Care

The full minutes can be found [here](#).

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

The Commission confirmed the following report:
2024-2025 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 1

The Commission would also be receiving the Tenant Satisfaction Measures Results from Crawley Homes at its meeting on 2 September 2024.

9. 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.

10. Temporary Accommodation Acquisitions Programme

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/090 of the Head of Strategic Housing. The report requested Cabinet approval for the expansion of the temporary accommodation acquisitions programme and to accept the allocation of grant funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund and Full Council is asked to approve the required budget to support the opportunity acquisitions necessary to achieve the objectives of this programme.

During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Housing Enabling and Development Manager, the following points were expressed:

- Recognition that it would allow officers to expand the temporary accommodation stock through acquisition opportunities and viable options, which had significant potential to contribute towards addressing Crawley's housing needs and assist in reducing the financial burden of using expensive nightly-paid accommodation, including out of borough placements.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the financial elements and the various detailed options documented within the report.
- General overall support for the proposal, as it was noted that the range of opportunities being explored would assist in future development of the areas and amenity, whilst increasing the council's portfolio of temporary accommodation.

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.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.48 pm.

M L Ayling (Chair)