

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Cabinet

Wednesday, 4 September 2024 at 7.00 pm

Councillors Present:

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:

Councillors	M L Ayling, D Crow and T Lunnon
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Officers Present:

Siraj Choudhury	Head of Governance, People & Performance
Ian Duke	Chief Executive
Chris Page	Deputy Chief Executive
Chris Pedlow	Democracy & Data Manager
Vicki Basley	Chief Accountant
Amanda Kendall	Head of Crawley Homes

1. Disclosures of Interest

No disclosures of interests were made.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 24 July 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader of the Council.

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. Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel Final Report

The Chair of the Housing Associations Scrutiny Panel, Councillor Lunnon, presented report [OSC/320a](#).

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. The report had previously been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Commission at its meeting on 23 July 2024 and its comments were included in an appendix to the report.

Councillor Jones highlighted that Cabinet noted the poor response of Registered Providers to the Scrutiny Review. Overall, it seems that Registered Providers did not recognise the democratic mandate of local Councillors, even when expressed through the powers of external scrutiny and other legislation.

The Cabinet agreed with the thrust of the Scrutiny Panel's recommendations. However, it was concerned whether, given the experience of the Review, officers would be able to secure the information and input required to undertake and secure the activities as set out in recommendations a) to d) as documented within report OSC/320a. It was felt, as the recommendations were currently written, the onus would be on officers who would then likely experience the same frustrations in securing the information that the Panel sought.

As a result, Councillor Jones highlighted to the Cabinet there had been a proposed amendment and slight revision to the recommendations, in that the Cabinet undertook to include the thrust of recommendations a) to d) within the letter requested in recommendation f) as documented in the supplementary agendas OSC/320b. This combined recommendation would now be referred to as recommendation i). In relation to recommendation e) from the Scrutiny Panel, that remained unchanged, was noted and was subject to further investigation to determine what further information could be provided. That was now referred to as recommendation ii). The rationale behind those changes was to request greater powers to scrutinise.

Councillors S Mullins, C Mullins, Rana and Irvine spoke as part of the discussion on the report. The Cabinet asked officers to publish a list of the RSLs in the Councillor's Information Bulletin for Councillors' reference.

Councillor Jones moved the report including the proposed changes which was seconded by Councillor Irvine.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet requests that:

- a) the Cabinet Member for Housing and/or Chief Executive write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government, along with relevant Government Departments calling for councils to have greater powers to scrutinise registered housing providers, along with powers to direct registered housing providers to make amends where failure occurs, and that this letter also requests that Registered Providers:
 - Provide a breakdown of their Tenant Satisfaction Measures at a local authority level (this is likely to apply where stock is above a certain level) and that this be provided to the relevant local authorities upon request.
 - Participate in local partnership and councillor activity convened by local authorities to address matters that relate directly to their stock and tenants.
 - Include local councillors within their engagement activity with tenants.
- b) Officers provide as much information as possible (in accordance with GDPR) to Registered Providers once a social tenancy is agreed so the Registered Provider can assist the tenant fully both prior and during the placement.

Reasons for the Recommendations

To understand the current processes, practices and systems that exist, together with the provision of support available to tenants, in order to address some of the concerns and improvements for consumer standards together with seeking to build on the relationships already in place between the Council and Registered Housing Providers.

6. Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code

The Cabinet Member for Housing presented report [CH/208](#) and associated [appendix](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes. The report sought approval for the new Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report along with the associated Statutory Complaints Handling Code. It was noted that it was a requirement by the Housing Ombudsman that those documents be produced, approved and then published on the Council's website. Councillor Irvine inform the Cabinet that part of the recommendation was to publish, via the Councillors' Information Bulletin, quarterly Housing complaints data and he commented that he would be pushing officers to make this information more readily available, even potentially monthly in due course.

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 2 September 2024, which included:

- It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code became legal from 1 April this year.
- It was noted that there had been more complaints in different areas of the town. This was in the latter half of last year and as a result of staffing issues, together with publicity in the sector, especially around damp and mould.
- It was noted that complaints can be an opportunity to highlight factors in order to provide a good service. Action plans and complaints were looked at monthly to ensure improvement.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Action Panel was thanked for the input and feedback, particularly into the Complaints Service Improvement Plan.

Councillors Jones, Nawaz, C Mullins and S Mullins spoke as part of the discussion on the report.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- a) approves the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code (appendix A) for adoption and subsequent publication, with subsequent complaint reports and complaints performance information being published in the Councillors’ Information Bulletin (as agreed in 2015).
- b) delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and the Leader of the Council, to approve the response, submission and publication of the report online, alongside the report and compliance with statutory code.
(Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).
- c) delegates authority to the Head of Crawley Homes, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing, to make minor amendments to the Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code as further changes are introduced, including as and when legislation and statutory guidance are forthcoming.
(Generic Delegation 7 will be used to enact this recommendation).

Reasons for the Recommendations

To comply with the Housing Ombudsman’s Statutory Complaints Handling Code, as set out in 4.1 of report [CH/208](#).

7. 2024-2025 Budget Monitoring - Quarter 1

The Leader presented report [FIN/665](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. The report set out a summary of the Council’s actual revenue and capital spending for the quarter to June 2024 together with the main variations from the approved spending levels and impact on future budgets.

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 2 September 2024, which included:

- Support that the Council was forecast to receive £816k of additional investment interest.
- Concern was expressed for the projected overspend of £575k due to the ratable values for business rates for the new Town Hall and Create Building, particularly in comparison to the rental income.
- Recognition that, with regards to New Burdens Funding to reimburse the full costs of Temporary Accommodation incurred for Chagossians, the Council still had yet to receive payment.
- Clarification was provided on the future of the TA budget and the work required to meet the ongoing challenges.

Councillor S Mullins spoke as part of the discussion on the report.

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet notes:

- a) the projected outturn for the financial year 2024/2025 as summarised in report [FIN/665](#).
- b) the adjustment to HRA Major Repairs Reserves opening balance as set out in section 7.8 of report [FIN/665](#).

Reasons for the Recommendations

To report to Councillors on the projected outturn for the year compared to the approved budget.

Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Cabinet concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.50 pm.

M G JONES
Chair