

Cabinet
Wednesday 4 September 2024

Comments from the Overview and Scrutiny Commission
at its meeting on Monday 2 September 2024
OSC/323

1. Cabinet Agenda Item – Crawley Homes Annual Complaints Performance and Service Improvement Report and Statutory Complaints Handling Code

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [CH/208](#) and associated [appendix](#) of the Head of Crawley Homes. During the discussion with the Cabinet Member for Housing, the Head of Crawley Homes and Crawley Homes Policy and Engagement Manager, the following comments were expressed:

- It was noted that the Housing Ombudsman’s Complaints Handling Code became statutory from 1 April 2024. It included additional requirements for scrutiny and oversight and detailed the effects and the ways in which Crawley Homes can liaise with tenants, together with the processes and mechanisms that the service had for addressing and monitoring complaints on a regular basis.
- It was acknowledged that there had been more complaints in the South in terms of repairs compared to the West of the town. This was in the latter half of last year and had resulted from staffing issues during that period, together with more publicity across the sector from the Housing Ombudsman, particularly around damp and mould, which had also impacted demand for inspections and surveying generally and leaving reduced capacity for complaint handling as a result. As part of the new restructure within the Responsive Repairs Service there would be a Complaints and Disrepair Manager that would primarily deal with stage 1 complaints, disrepair and assist with stage 2 complaints where appropriate. It was envisaged that the percentage of level one complaints completed within timescale would increase; the senior management team within Crawley Homes was proactively managing performance around this and ensuring that the correct culture was in place that placed compliant handling as a priority.
- Recognition that data was continually being analysed and systems issues were being addressed. This included enhanced training and a need around confidence with getting remedies right at stage 1 (as they underpin what happens with stage 2). It was noted that complaints can be an opportunity to highlight factors in order to provide a good service. Detailed service and action plans and complaints were analysed monthly to ensure continued improvement, along with quarterly reports.
- Clarification was sought and obtained on the unreasonable/vexatious complainers and potential trends.
- Confirmation was provided on the classification of formal complaints from the public, as opposed to those received as ‘member enquiries’.
- Details provided on the offer of financial and non-financial compensation. In some cases compensation may be justified, however the evidence and merit of awarding compensation would always be evaluated. A new compensation policy was being drafted which would offer appropriate remedies and compensation in a fair and justified approach.
- The Tenants and Leaseholders Action Panel (TLAP) was commended for the scrutinising, input and continued feedback, particularly into the Complaints Service Improvement Plan.

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.

2. Cabinet Agenda Item – 2024-2025 Budget Monitoring Quarter 1

Comments and Recommendations

The Commission considered report [FIN/665](#) of the Head of Corporate Finance. During the discussion with the Leader of the Council and Head of Corporate Finance, the following points were expressed:

- Support that the Council was forecast to receive £816k of additional investment interest, due to higher balances than predicted due to slippage in the capital programme and a number of longer term-deals with higher interest rates as a result of more proactive treasury management.
- Concern was expressed for the projected overspend of £575k due to the rateable values for business rates for the new Town Hall/Create Building, particularly in comparison to the rental income. It was confirmed that the rateable values for the unoccupied floors of the Create Building issued by the Valuation Office in the current financial year had come in substantially higher than anticipated. Work and investigations were continuing to explore mitigations.
- It was disappointing to note that the 2024/25 Repayment of PWLB figure had been omitted from the Major Repairs Reserve in the Financial Outturn 2023-2024 (Quarter 4) report. It was confirmed that the debt had been paid, and the correct figure was provided for transparency.
- 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.

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.

Councillor Ayling
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
2 September 2024