

SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12 April 2016 at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber, the Town Hall, Croydon.

This meeting was filmed for broadcast on the council's internet site at:

<http://www.croydon.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

MINUTES – PART A

Present Councillor Sean Fitzsimons
Councillors Sara Bashford (Vice Chairman), Carole Bonner (Deputy Chair), Sherwan Chowdhury, Mario Creatura and Joy Prince

Also in attendance for part or all of the meeting:

Councillor Bernadette Khan
Councillor Mark Watson

The Chair welcomed Councillor Joy Prince to the meeting, confirming that she had been appointed to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at a meeting of the General Purposes and Audit Committee on 23 March 2016 following the resignation of Councillor Emily Benn.

A25/16 APOLOGIES (Agenda Item 1)

None.

A26/16 MINUTES (Agenda Item 2)

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 16 February and Monday 7 March 2016 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

A27/16 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

None. However, Councillor Sean Fitzsimons and Councillor Carole Bonner informed those present for Item 7 – Financial Inclusion – that they were members of the Credit Union.

A28/16 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda Item 4)

There was one urgent item.

SE LONDON JHOSC NOMINATIONS

Present for this item:

Solomon Agutu, Statutory Scrutiny Officer

A South East London JHOSC to review future provision of a “place of safety” as delivered by SLaM has been convened on Tuesday 26 April 2016 at 8.30pm at Southwark Council. Each authority is required to nominate 2 representatives.

The Chair nominated Councillor Carole Bonner and Councillor Michael Neal, Chair and Vice Chairman of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee. He confirmed that this was a ‘one off’ meeting and that these Members have indicated that they are able to attend the meeting.

RESOLVED: To appoint Councillor Carole Bonner and Councillor Michael Neal, Chair and Vice Chairman respectively of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee as Croydon’s representatives on the South East London JHOSC for the meeting to be held on 26 April 2016 to review future provision of a “place of safety” delivered by SLaM.

A29/16 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda Item 5)

RESOLVED: To agree the allocation of business between Part A and Part B of the Agenda.

A30/16 DIGITAL INCLUSION (Agenda Item 6)

Present for this item:

- Councillor Mark Watson
- Graham Cadle, Assistant Chief Executive (Customer and Transformation)
- Anne Sturzaker, Go-ON Croydon Co-ordinator
- John Perkins, Doteveryone (was Go-ONE UK)
- Harry Frankland, attended sessions at Age UK Croydon
- Jillian Oxenham, attended Croydon Digital Zone
- Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau

Councillor Joy Prince confirmed that she had visited the Go-ON Croydon Digital Zone on Friday 8 April.

Councillor Mark Watson introduced the item by making a short presentation which has been added to the Council website **here**. A survey by CROYDON Citizens Advice Bureau on digital inclusion and a statement from Gordon Thompson of Canning & Clyde Roads Residents’ Association were circulated and also added to the Council website.

The Chair invited contributors to make a short statement before opening the meeting to Members questions:

John Perkins, Doteveryone (was Go-ON UK) stated that there was interest across the UK in what Go-ON Croydon was doing and that Doteveryone was working with other authorities including Lewisham. The work in Croydon would be evaluated in the Summer and at that stage it would be possible to assess what works and what is less successful. He added that the work with community groups was crucial and presented an important outreach opportunity. He asked Members to get in touch if they had ideas about community groups who might be interested in getting involved.

Harry Frankland attended Go-On sessions at Age UK Croydon and informed the Committee that he was 83 years old, had been given an i-pad by his son and wanted to learn how to use it. He stated that he could only use 15-20% of its capability but that he had been amazed at the information available to him. He stated that he is active, gets out and about and is a member of a number of groups but that he finds it hard to energise people of his age group. He said although he was happy to use the i-pad to find out about things he was interested in, he did not want to do his banking online.

Jillian Oxenham was a regular attendee at the Croydon Digital Zone having first visited as she needed to buy a bin for her garden waste. She had been reluctant to open a MyAccount but had been encouraged to do so and with encouragement and help was now able to send and receive emails, cut and paste copy and research things she was interested in. She added that she will now buy and use a computer of her own.

Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau stated that it was helpful to encourage people to get online and that it did help reduce expenditure. However she warned that filling in forms – such as those for Universal Credit – was not possible on smart phones or some other devices as the forms were too complicated, were not formatted for these and could not be saved. People therefore had to have access to all the information they needed before they started. She added that this was a surprise to many people.

Anne Sturzaker, Go-ON Croydon Co-ordinator stated that Job Centre + was a Go-ON partner and helped people complete forms for Universal Credit at their offices. She added that the Tinder Foundation which manages a national network of online centres was piloting packages to assist people before they start filling in an online application for Universal Credit. She also informed Members that there were a number of deep dive projects being undertaken through Go-ON including at Cedar Court which would help inform a roll out of the scheme to sheltered housing blocks. For groups where English is a second language, the involvement and support of community groups is key to digital inclusion and the

Council is keen to work with groups and move the project forward within these communities.

In response to Members questions, the following information was provided:

The Go-ON Croydon Co-ordinator said:

- Access to the Go-ON programme was available through a number of partners and community groups across the borough including in Bernard Weatherill House every Friday
- Staff aimed to provide help with what people needed to do (such as buy a garden bin) and then extend this to other interests or needs eg. marmalade making, ice hockey, watch Crystal Palace games on YouTube
- The staff do not teach visitors, they provide guidance and support in relation to basic principles such as logging out and password security
- People can bring in their smart phone and find out how to use them more effectively eg. setting up email and partners EE and Argos will also give people free advice about smart phones
- Using smart phones for functions beyond social media and texting is particularly important for job seekers who need to email cvs and fill in application forms etc
- The aim is to enable people to help themselves

The Assistant Chief Executive (Customer and Transformation) stated that:

- The gap between those who can operate online and those who could not was widening and the aim of the programme was to help ensure that as many as possible are not left behind
- The Go-ON website has a heat map which gives an indication of digital usage and the Committee report provides baseline information about usage in Croydon. This will be used when the evaluation takes place later in the year
- Anyone can come in to any of the Zones for help and, depending on their circumstances, it may be possible to integrate this with other support
- Some people do need extra help and the council was working with partners and others to help specific groups of people such as the elderly
- The Council was rolling out new IT kit and the old equipment would be recycled and made available to community groups for use in online hubs
- Those who are not able to get online for whatever reason will be assisted in other ways
- The evaluation of the Go-ON project will help the Council understand how digital inclusion can be encouraged and delivered better

John Perkins, Doteveryone (was Go-ONE UK) informed Members that:

- Some people will consciously self-exclude or may have issues which make it more difficult

- Work was being done with a number of organisations, such as the RNIB, to help people with visibility issues for example
- As broadband and equipment costs continue to reduce, fewer people are excluded for financial reasons
- The Digital Zones do tend to be town centre based which is why the work with community groups is so important especially as the local peer support and encouragement they can offer is very powerful
- Many people use smart phones for social media but they are not able to use them for email or other functions

Cabinet Member Councillor Mark Watson stated that:

- People who self-exclude cost the Council money and when people go online it releases funds to help those who are prevented from doing so for whatever reason
- Zones have been set up wherever we have partners and the Council is looking to fill in the gaps by working with community groups
- The maps which show the locations of Zones have been updated and this will continue to be done as more come online. In addition information can also be found through organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and partners
- Funding to help community groups set up digital hubs is available through the Active Communities Fund and Ward budget funds and partners are often willing to help fund equipment
- Another aspect of the work is to help small businesses get online and have a web presence as this helps boost business and help them connect with their customers more effectively
- Following the Cabinet decision to changes in housing allocation including online bidding, help will be provided to tenants who need it although most are already engaged as they pay rent and access other services online
- Equipment costs are coming down with tablets now available for under £100 and some broadband packages available for £4 per month
- It is easier for the Council and its partners to provide community groups with equipment rather than training support and as many already have Wi-Fi (eg. in a community hall) a hub can be quickly and easily created
- The Council is working towards installing broadband in social housing and has ambitions to bring Wi-Fi to public spaces in the borough
- Although some forms such as for Universal Credit are difficult to complete on smart phones, more services are now being designed with smart phones in mind

Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau provided Members with a summary of the survey results circulated before the meeting and, following questions added that:

- Many people found tablets easier to use than smart phones due to the size of the screen
- Access to resources and skills is key and the Council is working hard to help encourage this

- The CAB has booths which people can use with support but they are not popular as people come to us for face-to-face advice
- It is important to help change expectations about the services people receive as we can see more people face-to-face use online services

Anne Sturzaker, Go-ON Croydon Co-ordinator
 Harry Frankland, attended sessions at Age UK Croydon
 Jillian Oxenham, attended Croydon Digital Zone
 Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau

The Committee concluded that digital inclusion presented many social, financial and functional benefits to individuals and that the Council and partners should continue to use their best efforts to encourage those who can to engage with the digital world. The Committee did however sound a note of caution however in that it felt that the Council and partners must provide support to those people who were unable to engage online.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Ask the Assistant Chief Executive (Customer and Transformation) to formally send the outcomes arising from the evaluation of the Go-ON Croydon programme (to be undertaken later in 2016) to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee as soon as it is available.
2. Ask the Assistant Chief Executive (Customer and Transformation) to inform Members to come forward with ideas for community groups which might be interested in setting up a digital hub and to encourage them to use Ward budget funding to support this where such funds are available.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting for this item, particularly Mr Frankland and Mrs Oxenham for the very valuable insight they had offered to the Committee.

A31/16

FINANCIAL INCLUSION (Agenda Item 7)

Present for this item:

- Councillor Mark Watson
- Mark Fowler, Director of Gateway and Welfare
- Julia Pitt, Head of Gateway Service Development
- Karl Lartey, Personal Budget Support Officer
- Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau

Councillor Mark Watson and the Director of Gateway and Welfare introduced the item stating that providing assistance through the Gateway programme to people who needed it was important, made sense and that could make a remarkable difference to the lives of families. Following a question, the Director of Gateway and Welfare confirmed that an additional 200 service Social Care users had recently been identified bring the total number supported so far to 500.

The Personal Budget Support Officer provided further information to the Committee and in answers to questions informed Members that:

- The Gateway service received referrals from the Job Centre and offered hands on personal budget support
- The service dealt with high and medium level referrals where there were high levels of debt
- The transition to Universal Credit was very difficult for individuals as there was a transition period of 6 weeks where they received no money or financial support
- Once on Universal Credit individuals need support in financial management to prevent them spending the money and falling further into debt. This was particularly challenging around Christmas. Universal Credit customers have, with support, got better at financial management and in making the money last so that where monthly payments need to be made and where direct payments cannot be set up (eg. for rent) they have the funds available.
- At the start of the Universal Credit roll-out in July-August 2015, the service saw 15-20 people, in March 2016 the number had increased to 85
- There was hidden debt in many households and the role of the service is to help people look at their finances afresh and deal with issues
- One means of assistance is to help secure tenancies and negotiate with landlords to prevent evictions. This helps stabilise the finances of individuals/ families involved and saves the Council money when people are made homeless
- Often during the process other issues come to light, such as mental health issues, and officers refer service users appropriately
- The services also provides Universal Credit customers with digital support, referrals to specialist debt councillors and work coaches for job seekers
- Smart phones are used to update the journal and keeping the information on phones is helpful though there are some issues with the technology
- In relation to the need to provide information about Universal Credit online, experience shows that people where English is a second language, middle aged men including manual workers who have never had digital experience and single mums seem to have most difficulty.
- The time taken (given on pack page 51) to support customers was an accurate reflection of the work currently but it is expected to change as more people move on to Universal Credit and the transition to the new housing model comes in due to the number of people in temporary housing
- Officers have many difficult conversations with people about spending patterns and items that may not on the face of it be considered to be 'essential'. Eg. a Sky package may not seem to be essential but it may cost more to break the contract than to continue, or it may be that broadband is included and this is essential for work or school. Rather than making judgements about what is 'essential', we aim to help

people focus on their priorities and find ways to help eg. accepting free school meals instead of providing packed lunches. Our officers need to be direct and honest but not all service users will take advice.

The Director of Gateway and Welfare provided the following additional information to the Committee:

- Universal Credit was being gradually rolled-out in Croydon and that the total current caseload was 400 but that 36000 people were in receipt of housing benefit
- The numbers on Universal Credit was expected to rise steeply in the next few months and that given the processes involved it was difficult to help people make the transition quickly
- The Council had presented the DWP with its findings and experience that enabling direct payments for rent arrears can be very helpful in preventing increases to rent arrears and the potential for eviction
- The Gateway service was embedded in the People department of the Council and this was helpful as it would enable the service to build on its work of providing financial and housing stability to adult and children's social care
- In Croydon we have decided that providing financial stability is the cornerstone to giving people choices. It takes time to build support and a level of engagement to produce successful outcomes.
- The Gateway team has scaled its resources for the predicted level of need this year, has a 10 officer team and is being supported by the DWP

Caroline Mack, CEO Croydon Citizens Advice Bureau informed the Committee that the CAB was aware that many people are unable to put together a financial statement or balance weekly and monthly outgoings. She added that basic maths was also a challenge for many people.

Councillor Mark Watson stated that the Credit Union provided help with basic budgeting skills and offered 'jam jar' accounts which assisted many people.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Ask the Cabinet to seek support from the DWP to allow and enable direct payments for rent arrears when service users are making the transition to Universal Credit
2. Consider adding an update item on the Gateway service to the scrutiny work programme 2017/18 in order to review service delivery.

The Chair thanked officers for the information provided and encouraged them to forward any ideas on how further improvements could be made to scrutiny.

The Vice Chairman of the Committee stated that she was massively impressed with the work of the Gateway team and had referred many people to it for support. She added that the support and advice offered

was excellent and that she greatly admired the team as they were asked to have difficult, challenging and highly personal conversations with people. The Committee agreed and asked that congratulations be conveyed to all members of the Gateway team for the life-changing support they provide.

A32/16 RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda Item 8)

Present for this item
Solomon Agutu, Statutory scrutiny officer

The Committee considered the report and particularly the appendix and the Cabinet's responses to the recommendations made by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee in relation to Housing for Young People (young people takeover meeting, September 2015). The Vice Chairman of the Committee stated that at first glance the Cabinet seemed to have accepted the recommendations but closer inspection showed that the response did not reflect the needs of young people (see recommendation 1 part 5 and recommendation 5) and referred in a broad brush way to the Croydon Local Plan.

The Committee concluded that:

- It was glad to see that the recommendations had been accepted
- Further work on this report was needed, that the response should be tailored to the needs of young people and that more information in relation to timescales was required.
- The response received did not reflect the housing needs of young people revealed during the course of the review and that further information was needed before scrutiny could go back to the young with what could realistically be delivered for them

The Committee **RESOLVED** to ask Cabinet to revisit this report and provide more information to scrutiny including on timescales, impact on young people specifically and what can realistically be delivered to young people in Croydon.

A33/16 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17 (Agenda Item 9)

Present for this item:
Solomon Agutu, Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny

The Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny introduced the report by informing Members that it assumed that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee recommendation to move responsibility for 'housing' to the Streets and Environment Scrutiny Sub-Committee would take effect from the beginning of the new municipal year. He added that housing related matters have been programmed for the Autumn to allow the necessary constitutional changes to take place.

The Chair stated that he was meeting senior officers with the aim of bringing forward topics for pre-decision scrutiny. He added that he would also be reminding them of the recommendation made by this Committee at its last meeting for a Forward Plan of reports be made available to the Chair of Scrutiny.

The Vice Chairman stated that she had received a number of requests for topics from members of the public including a further review of Fairfield Halls, which is already on the long list for the work programme next year. The Committee agreed that this should be added to the work programme as early as is practicable in 2016/17.

RESOLVED - To:

1. Note that the draft Scrutiny Work Programme attached as Appendix 1 to this report assumes that responsibility for 'housing' will be removed from the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee and be allocated to the Streets and Environment Scrutiny Sub-Committee at full Council (as recommended by Scrutiny and Overview Committee at its meeting on 22 March 2016)
2. Agree the topics for consideration at the first meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and each Sub-Committee for the new municipal year 2016/17
3. Make suggestions for topics to be added to the 'long list of topics' for the scrutiny work programme overview for all Scrutiny Committees 2016/17 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report
4. Agree that the Chairs of Scrutiny agree an initial scrutiny work programme 2016/17 for consideration at the Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 28 June 2016 and that this should include an item on Fairfield Halls

A34/16

THANKS

The Chair thanked scrutiny officers and Members of scrutiny Committees for their valuable contribution to the success of scrutiny meetings throughout the year.

The meeting concluded at 9:07pm.

PART B

It was not necessary for the Committee to refer to the Part B papers circulated with the Agenda.