

SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 10 January 2017 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 Jan Buttinger (Vice Chairman), Carole Bonner (Deputy Chair),
Kathy Bee and Joy Prince

Also in attendance for Agenda Item 7 was Cllr Helen Pollard, member for
Fairfield Ward.

A01/17 APOLOGIES (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were given by

A02/17 MINUTES (Agenda Item 2)

RESOLVED: The minutes of the meetings held on Tuesday 13 December
2016 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

Members commented on the following excerpt from the minutes:

*The Cabinet Member stressed that the council was seeking to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible. This was to be achieved by deleting vacant posts and making major reductions in the use of agency staff, as was done in the restructure of the Contact Centre. This had involved a reduction of 100 full-time posts without bringing about a single compulsory redundancy. **The Cabinet Member undertook to provide staffing numbers over the last three years to members of the committee after the meeting.***

Not having received this information, members asked that these should be forwarded to them as soon as possible.

A03/17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda Item 3)

None.

A04/17 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda Item 4)

None.

A05/17 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda Item 5)

There were none.

A06/17 QUESTION TIME: THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND JOBS (Agenda Item 6)

Councillor Mark Watson, Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs, gave a presentation on Croydon's economy and on recent and current initiatives relating to his portfolio.

Cllr Watson gave an overview of Croydon's current assets. He highlighted the following:

- Croydon offers some of the capital's most affordable housing
- 8,359 new homes are set to be built in the borough's opportunity area by 2013
- Croydon has capacity for up to 2.8 million square feet of Grade A office space
- The cost of office space in the borough, 15 minutes from central London, is 1/5 that of comparable office space in the West End
- 84% of Croydon's schools rated either outstanding or good
- The borough is set to benefit from a £320m school investment programme
- Croydon has UK's fastest growing economy as well as London's fastest growing tech cluster, with 1630 tech businesses and 3705 tech employees
- The survival rate of businesses in the borough between 2009 and 2016 was 86.6%

Cllr Watson ran through some of the regeneration work in the borough's district centre, including the following:

- The major redevelopment project in Purley
- Significant investment in Coulsdon through the delivery of Cane Hill, Lion Green Road car park and a town centre master plan
- Addressing the dilapidation in some parts of South Norwood through investment in some key retail and residential units
- Communities and places in Norbury and Thornton Heath enhanced through heritage and conservation-led regeneration

Cllr Watson highlighted the opportunities for development presented by Croydon's Growth Zone. This will aim to deliver 23594 new jobs including

5097 posts during the growth phase, and run until 2038, with several phases of infrastructure development.

Cllr Watson also reminded members of other recently completed initiatives, including the Box Park bar complex, improvements to the night-time economy such as the roof-top cinema and pop-up events at St George's Walk, and Croydon's Pride Fest. Also supporting the borough's economic development are the Good Employer Scheme aiming to bring economic benefits to all people working in the borough, local business networks such as Business Improvement Districts and the implementation of business Rate Relief to retain businesses and jobs in the borough.

Members requested more information on the 9.3% annual Growth Value Added benefits mentioned in the Cabinet Member's presentation, which he undertook to provide.

Asked which were the initiatives which were most likely to bring about significant improvements for Croydon's economy, the Cabinet Member highlighted the following:

- The major initiatives in the town centre
- The borough's Good Employer Charter
- The improvements to District Centres

Cllr Watson stated that the national retail trend away from district centres towards out-of-town shopping malls was being reversed to some extent and that the work of Business Improvement Districts such as the one in Purley were restoring vitality to high streets. This could be improved further with a pro-active approach bringing together all key stakeholders. He added that the council needed to work with local landlords to ensure that they were motivated to let their shopping units, improve footfall and thus create a virtuous circle of prosperity. He also felt that all necessary steps should be taken to encourage the public to shop locally. In particular, he highlighted the good range of food shops in Addiscombe and environmental improvements to improve the attractiveness of district centres, e.g. steps to the multi-storey car park in Purley.

Cllr Watson expressed concerns regarding the impact of the rail strike on the borough's future economic prospects, as businesses assess the reliability of transport services and their impact on staff and productivity in the long term.

Committee members concurred with these concerns and asked what pressure the Cabinet Member might exert on rail companies to resolve the current issues as well as improve the appearance of East Croydon station. Cllr Watson replied that there were plans to increase capacity at this railway station.

Asked what measures were being taken to improve the prospects of school leavers in the borough, the Cabinet Member highlighted the work

being carried out by the council to encourage local businesses to offer work experience to pupils in the borough. However, he acknowledge the difficulties being experienced in linking up businesses with schools and overcoming administrative hurdles to secure placements.

Members discussed measures being taken to enable the digitally disadvantaged to develop their I.T. skills. They were advised that there had been a significant increase in the acquisition and use of such skills in the borough, leading to major improvements in quality of life. Members were advised that a good approach to encouraging the take-up of such skills was to give people good reasons to go online.

Members pointed to a recommendation in the 2011 review of disturbances in Croydon, which called for a coordinated approach to economic development in West Croydon, which had suffered some of the worst damage during the disturbances. They asked for an update on the economic development of the area. The Cabinet Member replied that £10m had been allocated to the redevelopment of the area, and to community-led projects to identify and implement improvements to the area. He also highlighted the new mushroom growing business in the Reeves Corner area, where arson had burnt local shops to the ground. Members felt that more efforts should be made to revitalise that area of Old Croydon. They expressed concerns that the area might not be developed for years and might become a blight on that part of the borough. The Cabinet Member stated that there were plans in place to invite developers to the site and encourage them to put forward ideas for redeveloping the site.

As the next local council elections loom on the horizon, the Cabinet Member was asked what evidence he could show the electorate to demonstrate that the economy had genuinely improved since the last elections in 2014. Cllr Watson highlighted improved support to local businesses, better pay and the importance of attracting “the right jobs”.

Cllr Watson was thanked for his presentation and answers to Members’ questions.

A07/17

DEVELOPMENT OF SURREY STREET (Agenda Item 7)

Cllr Watson gave a brief presentation regarding the proposed development on Surrey Street, where a daily market is held. Members were advised that the sum of £500,000 was due to be spent from the capital programme on improvements to the street, as well as the same amount in match funding from Section 106 contributions. Plans include a level carriageway for all stalls to improve access, improved signage from major railway stations and improved lighting including “architectural lighting”. The area is already benefiting from pieces of public art and free wifi.

Members were advised that officers were currently working on relevant

planning applications. They asked whether any planning constraints were anticipated and were told that there might be some in respect of lighting, which were under discussion at the moment.

Cllr Watson explained that consultation had taken place with stallholders and businesses on the possibility of holding regular Sunday markets, and that he wished the street to be used in the evenings as well as during the day. Members were advised that local businesses were keen on having a Sunday market even in winter and that about ten stalls were regularly selling their wares on those days.

Cllr Watson explained that the market would primarily sell food, but that more variety would be encouraged. Members were advised that jewellery was also on sale at Sunday markets. He stated that the cost of hiring a stall on Sundays was only £15, which constituted a golden opportunity for businesses to experiment. Cllr Watson also suggested that food could be sold in Surrey Street in the evening, to increase footfall in the area after office hours.

Members were advised that there had been delays to implementation due to logistics and issues relating to emergency services. Public realm works were due to start in end February, to be followed by lighting and art installations.

Some concerns were expressed regarding the risk that modernising the area might destroy its character. It was pointed out that Surrey Street had the oldest market in the capital. Cllr Watson reassured the committee that designs would respect the character of the area.

A user of the Surrey Street market was invited to contribute to discussions. He stated that it was appropriate to work with stallholders to improve the area, and also encouraged the council to consult the London Street Trading Benchmarking group for their ideas on proposed designs. The speaker also expressed his concerns regarding the very limited involvement of local residents in consultation. They were worried about the impact of increased market hours on lorry access for deliveries and about the likelihood of increased noise levels.

The speaker stated that the designs for signs seemed too high, limiting visibility, and expressed disappointment at officers' opposition to their suggestions on attractive lighting designs. Cllr Watson agreed that the design for multi-coloured lamps across the street were an eye-catching idea, but explained that the first priority was to carry out works to deal with electrics, road surfacing, etc.

Members expressed their surprise at the fact that Surrey Street had not had any more regeneration, and sought assurances that the £1m allocated to the refurbishment of the street would lead to significant improvements to its appearance. In particular, they pointed out that improvements should make up for the fact that the street could be quite

dark during the winter season. They asked for estimates of completion dates, which Councillor Watson undertook to provide after the meeting, and expressed the hope that the refurbishment of Surrey Street could be genuinely “future-proofed”. They added that Croydon BID could be encouraged to contribute towards some elements of the refurbishment.

The needs of local residents were discussed. It was observed that their numbers had grown significantly with the building of new flats near the market. It was emphasised that the Council needed to have explicit and clearly publicised rules regarding noise tolerance levels. In addition, it was vital to enforce the installation of good sound insulation for new build properties.

Concluded

1) Surrey Street Market serves the whole of Croydon and welcomes the scale of investment in Surrey Street as the area had been neglected for far too long.

2) The committee agrees that Council should listen to the views of all stakeholders including traders, customers, local businesses and residents, and should review its approach to future consultations. With the agreed underlying policy objective of ensuring there is a thriving street market.

3) The Council should not lose sight of its original ideas for the market which was to improve the look of the market through an upgrade of the stalls.

4) Agreed that the refurbishment of Surrey Street can contribute to the growth of the evening and night-time economy but the council should have regard to the impact this may have on local residents.

5) That the council should not be so prescriptive over the make-up of the Sunday Market if there is a demand from stall holders to trade on a Sunday, as older markets do need to adapt to modern shopping patterns and many people now shop for the groceries on a Sunday.

Members agreed two recommendations, set out below. They agreed to review the progress of this refurbishment initiative in future months.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Council should make explicit that one of its key objectives is to ensure a thriving street market in Surrey Street.
2. The physical refurbishment of the Surrey Street area needs to be future-proofed not just for the changing needs of the market, but also for the evening/night-time economy and for one-off events. This includes the installation of street lights and power supplies

that an accommodate these demands, and avoid the need for temporary supplies.

3. The Council further shows its commitment to having a thriving street market in Surrey Street by installing arches to the entrances of the market and to maximise potential benefits from the refurbishment by funding the upgrade of the market stalls.
4. The Council review its stakeholder management of market and surrounding area to give all a voice.
5. Review the trading arrangements of Sunday Market and the restrictions on who can trade.
6. When the Council reviews its licensing strategy that its key objective of a thriving Surrey Street is taken into account.

A08 /17

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME (Agenda Item 8)

Members discussed the work programme for the rest of the municipal year.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- To agree the scrutiny work programme overview (as set out in Appendix 1 of the report)
- To agree the work programme for the Scrutiny and Overview Committee 2016-17, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report
- to ask Democratic Services officers to explore the possibility of including an agenda item on the Westfield Hammerson development in the 2017/2018 work programme.

The meeting ended at 9:08 pm.