

## **Scrutiny & Overview Committee**

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 12 December 2017 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,  
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);  
Councillor Jan Buttinger (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Carole Bonner, Patsy Cummings, Stephen Mann and Sue Winborn

**Also Present:** Councillor Simon Hall and Tony Newman

**Apologies:** Councillor Vidhi Mohan and Alisa Flemming

### **PART A**

#### **57/17 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2017 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **58/17 Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### **59/17 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **60/17 Children Improvement Plan**

Officers updated the Committee Members with the progress of the improvement plan. They highlighted that the Improvement Plan had been signed off by Cabinet and had been submitted to Ofsted. The Department of Education had appointed a Commissioner who had completed and submitted a report to the Minister commenting on both the quality of the plan and the Council's capacity to improve the service. A decision on both these issues by the Minister would be published in the New Year.

Officers had been assertive in strengthening Children's Services. The service had received strong corporate support that was led well by the Chief Executive and elected Members. The Committee learned that a £3 million investment had been made into the core services, including the recruitment of social work surge teams to deal with high demand and additional business

support teams to reduce the amount of time spent on administrative duties by social workers.

Officers pointed out that there were still a number of challenges that would take time to progress. The idea behind the Improvement Plan Programme was to follow the journey of a child from the referral stage through to conclusion. The report indicated the strengths of corporate parenting panel, which had regular reviews on the considerable pressure that the service was experiencing.

The Committee learned that following changes in management, the service was implementing a new structure with temporary arrangements that had been put in place. The officers highlighted that the need of the service was to focus on the children that used the service, and to ascertain that the service was fully resourced to provide a better outcome. The new structure was scheduled to be implemented in the new financial year.

The Committee learned that there had been a forty percent increase in referrals following the inspection. With high cases loads entering from the front door service, the service had put in place additional temporary capacity to address the pressure.

The Committee was further informed of the challenges in the service including a stronger focus on transparency and improvement. They heard how the service had established new key performance indicators to better reflect the delivery of good outcomes for children and these had been developed in partnership with the Independent Chair of the Improvement Panel.

The Committee learned that recruiting permanent social workers in Children's Services was a significant challenge. Officers were confident that good social workers who had worked in Croydon for a long period of time would build relationships, support, and would also invest in training and self-development. Officers shared that the service needed to improve on its stability in senior leadership and frontline workers which would restore relationships with families and key agencies. Officers informed the Committee that the Service was working with the Director of Human Resources to develop a "Total Rewards" scheme to attract and retain high quality permanent staff.

Children's Services had also wanted to refresh and strengthen connections with universities to develop great students and Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers.

The Committee learned that systems of support had been put in place for the health and wellbeing of social workers. Emotional resilience support work with human resources had also been put in place to support social workers.

The Committee learned that further work was in progress to gain trust from staff as the service improved. Officers had received a high level of staff engagement in open sessions and sprint sessions which had positively contributed to the work of the Improvement Board. Further opportunities for

staff to have their voice heard had been established through the creation of a suggestion box for all staff to use and an email discussion forum.

Officers shared the idea of the career pathway for social workers to progress through the system to become practitioners. A new proposed role of the Principle Social Worker would see a number of consultant practitioners, and this role would be to support practice development. The Committee learned that the role of consultant practitioners would be to provide support reflecting on cases. This role had been received well by staff as colleagues share their difficulty in similar and complex cases and receiving support to better manage their case. Officers shared that as social work teams are revising the line manager to staff ratio from 9:1 to 6:1, the work of a consultant practitioner would be part of a regular routine. There was an opportunity to share cases. The Committee learned that cases are managed by the unit manager, and the reflective casework would be supported by the consultant practitioner. The response from social worker team was supported, and there would be lots of opportunities from this move.

The Committee acknowledged the amount of development work with staff that was being delivered. They welcomed the idea of the suggestion box for staff to be candid without pressure of line management or senior management, and the level of support provided.

The Committee was updated on the pulse survey and work satisfaction, and learned that the pulse survey is circulated quarterly. Following the recent distribution of the survey to all staff, a high response had been fed back pending detailed analysis. It was clear that responses were challenging. The pulse survey was a way to understand staff satisfaction. The service had also heard more on staff satisfaction from staff reference groups. Staff had been spoken to in open door sessions and sprint sessions. Officers shared that there was a consensus from staff of dissatisfaction, and the service had proposed to address the interventions needed to make the service better for staff to contribute to better working and feeling valued.

The Chair noted the low percentage figure of the pulse survey and was concerned at the level of response to the survey as it had fallen below the initial baseline. The Committee would want to see a better response percentage from the next pulse survey to better understand staff satisfaction in the service.

The Committee learned of the ASYEs in Children's Services and heard that of the twenty-four that had started in the first cohort, all but one ASYE social worker had remained in Croydon. All the twenty-three ASYE's were now fully qualified and had committed to working in Croydon. Commitment in staffing was also retained by locum staff as many of the locum staff had been working in Croydon for two or more years consistently. The Committee learned that newly qualified social workers that completed their essential training were restricted in the number of caseloads that they could manage to balance their workforce.

The Committee learned that the service was prioritising the management of caseload numbers for staff. They learned that child protection services had the highest pressure and additional resources had been put in place. There had also been an increase in the number of care proceeding cases where the number had reached over one hundred, and two additional solicitors had been recruited to support the service on these cases.

The Committee learned that financially Children's Services would need to improve over time for the service to have a benchmark. They heard that £3 million pounds had been invested for additional support and business support staff to meet the demands within the service. The Local Government Association report shared challenges around mental health, homelessness and housing provision and schools that had put pressure on the wider system. Croydon Children's Services had responded to the pressure and services from across the Council had responded with support, however, there was generally a wider funding issue impacting families, as such Children's Services had been allocated £10 million pounds to invest into developing a better service.

The Committee learned of the IT and software systems used by the frontline social workers, and heard that significant development had been put in place such as scanning documents directly onto the case management system. The system used was widely used across England. An active operational group for ICT was also arranged. The service was aiming for a higher success rate for ICT which included training and workshop to support staff.

The Committee learned of partnership working and the importance of working with other bodies i.e. the Croydon Commissioning Group (CCG) and the police in particular. They heard that the progress in partnership working with the Police and CCG over the last year included sitting on the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which had a number of other partners involved. They heard that statutory partners such as the police and CCG amongst others had focused their priorities on outcomes for children. They heard that the focus on children and young people was around issues on vulnerable adolescence. Children's Services also had the Children's safeguarding board sit on the LSP Board alongside other partners with children being the core focus. Children's Services would be developing strategic level and assist on operational level in delivering enhanced Early Help service. The new Chair had been very clear and forceful in terms of determination in moving the system forward and working together with partners. This had added additional momentum in partnership working. Partners also would be creating robust professional challenge to develop better partnership. Officers shared that good outcomes cannot be delivered by one agency alone and needed to be a whole partnership working collectively. Officers noted that on the operational level Children's service had started to build relationships and understanding with key officers and organisations and needed to provide a clear message of the service provided by Children's Services and Early Help to key partners.

The Chair thanked the officers for the in-depth answers to questions asked, as the purpose is to challenge the Improvement Plan. The Committee

proposed for more information on the progress of the key performance indicators and IT systems over the coming months. The Committee was keen to invite the borough Commander to attend the Scrutiny and Overview meeting on 6 March to ask of his role in the Children's Services Improvement plan and partnership working.

## 61/17 **Leader's Question Time**

The Leader shared his presentation of pressures and highlights within the Borough, which included:

- the wider pressures of Children's Services following Ofsted's Report that welcomed the Children's Improvement Plan;
- the Brick by Brick scheme of affordable housing for local residents within the borough;
- the go-ahead of the redevelopment of the Whitgift Centre and the plan to provide seven thousand new jobs;
- the direct intervention of a new leisure centre in New Addington;
- the transformation of Fairfield Halls;
- the new investment in Surrey Street;
- the huge commitment and success of Box Park;
- the multimillion private sector investment in the Legacy Centre in Whitehorse Lane that provided the opportunity for hundreds of young people to participate in educational fun filled activities;
- the Choose Your Future Campaign, where young people were the centre of attention addressing what they wanted in their community;
- the extra resources for "Don't Mess with Croydon", which had achieved significant results; and
- the air quality in Croydon, as the borough wanted to be a part in improving quality in air, including proposals to dramatically expand the tram network.

The Leader proposed that in the next four years the Council would:

- drive a better standard in health devolution, to get more residents signed up with their GP to receiving services;
- Invest in providing decent wages to staff working in Croydon;
- The notion of Fair Funding as growth in population and infrastructure is under pressure in the borough which was a challenge.

The Leader highlighted that a lot of work would be required to secure Croydon's future which would take some time due to the current pressure Croydon is facing with the budget and demand for services.

The Committee learned that the public commitment to the redevelopment of the Whitgift Centre would bring Croydon more opportunities. Work had been proposed to start around the end of 2018.

Members of the Committee noted that the Council was reaching the end of its four-year term and they heard that there had been areas of success and areas of work that were still challenges over that period. These had included:

- Keeping the streets clean and increasing the recycling rate.
- Building real partnerships with Stanley Halls, Ashburton Library Launch, and Ward Budgets.
- Wandle Park success, although there was more work to do.
- The ongoing pressures within key services.
- South Norwood Library – and how to replicate this success in other district centres.

The Leader noted that there was real progress in most areas whilst not being complacent that there was still more that could be done. The Leader noted that money was not everything as the society's commitment working alongside the Council was also key to a thriving Borough.

Members of the Committee heard that the Council was continuing to Champion the London Living Wage amongst businesses in the Borough. The Committee learned that the London living wage would not work in Croydon if workers were not getting that pay. The bar would need to be set higher as the cost of residing in Croydon had risen.

The Committee learned that the Leader's largest long term concern was the budget pressure on local authority services, which would become unsustainable if the Government continued its programme of cuts. The Leader's immediate concern was responding strongly to the recommendations made by Ofsted regarding Children's Services ensuring that the improvement plan was delivered.

Members of the Committee noted that the Gateway service had been a huge success despite budget pressures. They learned that there were plans to expand the service and support families and households that were affected by Government cuts. The Leader further described the challenge to increase work focused on the health prevention and the challenges facing Croydon's health providers.

Members of the Committee noted that over recent months, there had appeared to be some changes to Boxpark. Some Members of the Committee expressed a view that events at the venue were targeted at only a small audience and sought assurance that the Venue would continue to have a broad appeal.

The Chair asked the Leader about the challenges the Council would face as a result of 'Brexit'. The Committee learned that there was uncertainty on the impact on the local economy and public services. The Leader asserted that London and Croydon were resilient but needed to plan well to ensure that they remained resilient as the full impact of 'Brexit' became clear.

The Chair thanked the Leader for his Question Time.

**Budget 2018-19**

Presentation from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Treasury spoke of the current status of the financial position, the growth pressures and saving options.

The Committee learned that the growth pressures are having a massive impact on the local authority and the current underfunding in Croydon is having an impact. The overall position of the level of funding was highlighted in the presentation. The Committee was reminded that Croydon is an outer London borough with inner London needs and would have had an additional £28 million more to spend on Council services if funded at inner London rates.

The Committee heard that there was a lot of budget pressures within Adults and Children's Social Care and Children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The Committee learned that there was a growing pressure on demand in Children's Services following the recent Ofsted inspection. With investment being made to enable the delivery of the Improvement Plan.

The Committee learned that there had been a recruitment freeze within the borough for all but essential roles.

The Committee learned of the 2018/19 financial budget plans and growth pressure. Officers shared that £10 million pounds had been allocated to Children's Services were the biggest pressure currently resides. The Committee learned that Adults of all age and disability group was a growing population where the service had a duty to deliver and support.

The Committee learned that complexity was increasing and staffing in SEN had increased to deal with demand. There was an improved service in out of hospital care and this was improving lives of residences.

The Committee learned of the savings and what the local authority could do to save money. These were all listed in detail in the appendix to the report.

The Committee learned that there had been options considered and discarded as savings by officers and members as part of the budget preparation process.

Members of the Committee learned that some spending was on things the Council could not control, for example concessionary fares, and would not change the overall funding in Croydon.

Members of the Committee noted the presentation. They learned that Croydon was doing more to promote commercialisation, for example, Brick by Brick.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hall and the officers for their presentation and contributions, and concluded that Council tax and the council tax precept would be a decision for the Cabinet in February.

63/17 **Work Programme**

The Senior Democratic Services and Governance Officer guided the Committee through the proposed work programme for the remainder of the municipal year. It was noted that the schedule would be subject to change for the coming scheduled meetings.

The Chair made note that the forthcoming meeting in January 2018 would hear Question Time of two Cabinet Members as well as the Children's Improvement Plan.

The Committee **NOTED** the work programme.

The meeting ended at 9.10 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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