

## **Scrutiny Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee**

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 6 November 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

### **MINUTES**

- Present:** Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);  
Councillors Robert Canning, Luke Clancy, Felicity Flynn and Callton Young
- Also Present:** Councillor Stuart King, Cabinet Member for Transport Environment and Regeneration.  
Councillor Alison Butler, Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services  
Councillors Gareth Streeter and Lynn Hale  
Steve Iles, Director of Public Realm  
Richard Lancaster, Strategic Transport Manager [Projects]  
Ben Kennedy, Transport Strategy Manager  
Julia Pitt, Director of Gateway  
David Morris, Programme Lead, Gateway Services  
Jane Porter, Chief Operating Officer OPTIVO  
Tracy Cullen, Chief Executive CCHA  
Anne Tighe, Chief Executive CAYSH  
Gary Langston, Lead Manager, Thames Reach
- Apologies:** Councillors Jan Buttinger and Richard Chatterjee

### **PART A**

#### **33/18 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **34/18 Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### **35/18 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### **36/18 Cabinet Member Question Time: Cabinet Member for Environment Transport and Regeneration**

The Cabinet Member for Environment Transport and Regeneration, Councillor Stuart King, gave a presentation on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Tensions arising from areas within his portfolio.

The Sub-Committee was informed that there were 33 specific commitments within the Manifesto which applied specifically to his portfolio. In order for these objectives to be achieved, there needed to be clear political and managerial leadership behind the plans.

The presentation highlighted the following:

- The Borough was experiencing rapid growth with a unique growth zone model which will have £3mil investment on social infrastructure, public realm and transport over the next few years.
- The £100mil plus contract awarded to Conway for the Next Generation Highways contract
- Lack of financial support to deliver the Tram extension irrespective of Transport for London's (TFL) support for the extension.
- As TFL no longer received revenue funding from government, there were challenges to the Blackhorse Lane project and the Mayors support on this would be welcomed.
- Increase of car ownership has proved to be a challenge in the drive to deliver 80% across London of the Mayors Transport Strategy for journeys to be completed through cycling or other methods such as walking or public transport.
- Brighton Mainline upgrade was underway following various consultation events having taken place.
- A bus review for the south of the Borough was in progress with plans in place for the review to be extended to the north of the Borough.

It was questioned what has been done by the Council to ensure that the current plans for the Blackhorse Lane bridge did not continue to be delayed. The Cabinet Member responded that a lot had already been done through official and political channels and that this was a joint procurement process between the Council and TFL. As an interested stakeholder, a robust challenge had been made to the contractor about how unacceptable the delays were. TFL had also been informed to hold the contractor to account.

It was further asked what mitigation measures had been put in place for business owners in the area who petitioned for a discount during this period and it was suggested that a co-ordinated Cabinet response was required on this matter. The Cabinet Member responded that compensation was being sought from TFL, and discussions were taking place with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources regarding the application of business rates relief for those affected.

It was also acknowledged that there would be a need for a closure to pedestrians at some point during the works to the Bridge. A Member enquired whether it would be possible to ensure that this did not occur during school term time. The Cabinet Member replied that it was difficult to guarantee that the work would not occur during school times, but it had been requested for escorted access to be arranged during school times in the am and pm in the event of closures to minimise disruption where possible.

A Member questioned the value of the work completed on Public Realm projects. The Cabinet Member responded that the pedestrianisation of the high street and the activities that had occurred in that space to date had been exciting and well received.

It was highlighted that the government had announced that an extra £420 mil would be spent on potholes and queried if Croydon was eligible for a share. The Cabinet Member responded that Croydon was not eligible for a share, this was one of features of devolution in London. London car drivers pay £500mil in vehicle excise duty, the government pays nothing in revenue funding to TFL and the whole £500mi of vehicle excise duty was being spent on roads outside of London. It was regrettable that the Council was not funded properly and devolution for vehicle excise duty money had been called for on many occasions.

It was commented that the Royal Society of Public Health had published a report which highlighted three entries from Croydon in London's top 10 unhealthiest streets. The Cabinet Member felt that this report painted an inaccurate picture of the north of the Borough, especially in light of the recent £2.4mil regeneration of Thornton Heath High Street which had brought the community together. An evaluation would be organised to assess the impact of the work completed on public realm and whether the outcomes intended had been realised. There was an aspiration for more work to be undertaken in the area over the next 3 years

A Member highlighted that it was almost the two year anniversary of the Tram incident and as such it was disappointing that many of the recommendations made at meetings following the incident had yet to be implemented. The Cabinet Member acknowledged the approach to this poignant time and informed the Sub-Committee that the Leader was in the process of writing to TFL regarding the recommendations that had not yet been completed. A paper would be presented at Cabinet later this year on the internal Council review of the response to the incident and along with any lessons learnt.

A Member raised concerns from ward residents regarding the reduction in frequency of many bus routes as well as the removal of bus stops in their area despite consultation which recommended to retain them. It was asked how confident officers were that TFL would listen to residents and the Council during the upcoming bus review particularly in light of budget constraints. Additionally reassurance was sought that the Local Plan would form part of the decision making process for the bus review in light of the expected growth of the borough.

Officers responded that discussions had taken place with TFL regarding the concerns shared and that residents may view the consultation as simply a box ticking exercise. Officers had been clear that they want the best outcome for Croydon and were confident that there would be a positive outcome. TFL were clear that the Council was willing to take a private as well as a public approach to address concerns if necessary, but were confident that the desired outcome could be achieved without taking this approach. Croydon was one of the few boroughs in which bus usage had risen with figures showing a 6% increase and as such it would be in TfL's best interest to invest in the borough.

It was commented that it would be beneficial to see the timeline of the bus review and influence on Petal (PTL) ratings on decision making. The Cabinet Member responded that the review was in its early stages and encouraged all Ward Councillors to engage with the process and ensure that their input was fed into the consultation.

A Member noted that while TfL had finalised a good scheme for the 5 ways improvement, the work would not commence until 2021 and questioned whether there was scope to bring the start date forward. Officers replied that this was a much improved scheme and one of the challenges for time scale was the environmental assessment that had to take place prior to proceeding with the project. Additionally, as large sums of public money was to be used on the scheme, a rigorous procurement process would be needed to sign up the right consultants and contractors to deliver the budget on time and to the expected standards. This also contributed to delays in schemes such as this.

Officers informed the Sub-Committee that in terms of the timeline for delivery of the scheme, it would be going through planning process over the next six months. TFL were preparing to submit screening opinion to the Council to determine the environmental impact and planning requirements. Beyond that there was an extended 2 year periods for detailed planning designs, followed by a construction period of two years. The Council was working with TFL to identify and shorten time scale where possible. There was still a long way to go and at this stage the Council was working with Westfield to establish how both parties would interact with each other.

It was questioned what had been done to achieve the cycling targets, how realistic the targets from Central Government and TFL were and whether there was more funding available to realise projects given the intensification of Croydon. Officers advised that Croydon was fortunate that through the Growth Zone programme there was £309mil funding available for infrastructure investment over the next 20 years, which had been earmarked for over 46 projects. Part of the programme of funding had an element for cycling which will fund programmes in the wider cycling strategy.

The Chair raised questions on the school travel programme which, although a very good idea, had not produced the desired outcomes. Some schools had worked very hard on the programme, but there was little evidence of their progress. It was disappointing that a significant amount of children attended schools that did not consider the impact of travel on children and the

environment a priority. It would be beneficial for the Sub-Committee to be provided with figures on the percentage of schools that had received accreditation.

Officers responded that it was expected that the percentage would be significant. In particular for new schools which required accreditation as part of their planning process. The Council had been working extensively with schools and encouraged them to attain at least bronze accreditation. It was acknowledged that it was more difficult due to the lack of ability to enforce the programme in existing schools, but instead work was focused on encouraging and engaging school leaders to expand their role from that of just an educational remit.

The Chair welcomed the series of consultations on the Brighton Main Line (BML) upgrade but was concerned about potential disruption and impact for East Croydon. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council was supporting of the BML upgrade due to the benefits it would deliver for the transport links in the area as well as the wider economic benefits. It was acknowledged that there had already been disruption to current services from the upgrade, which would be short term and needed to be absorbed in order to realise the potential long term benefits.

The Chair also commented on the lack of connectivity from inner London Boroughs to the north of Croydon and suggested that this needed increased consideration due to the impending expected increase in growth. The lack of connectivity would result in the north of the borough being unable to sustain the growth expected. It was questioned what representations had been made to the Mayor and Government about the need to connect the Croydon tram system to its neighbours.

Officers responded that these points had been raised with Heidi Alexander, Deputy Mayor for Transport and letters were being sent to make a case for the extension of public transport. Funding had been identified for West Croydon station and in order to deliver the Mayor's ambition of 80% sustainable travel more work was needed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for answers to questions.

In reaching its recommendations, the Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. The Cabinet Member and officers were thanked for their presentation and report.
2. That going forward, rolling trackers for recommendations would be implemented to ensure that they were being monitored and completed as required.
3. There was a concern at the lack of progress made on some of the recommendations that has been made over the last few years, in

particular in relation to bonfires, smoke control and the impact on air quality.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Recommend to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Regeneration for exact timescales to be provided on the resolution of outstanding recommendations.
2. Recommend to the Cabinet Member for Environment, Transport and Regeneration for a review of Public byelaws to take place despite constraints.
3. Recommend to Cabinet that Business Rates Relief be considered for those affected by the delays in the completion of the Blackhorse Lane Bridge.

### **37/18 Housing in Croydon**

The Director of Gateway introduced the item following the Chairs congratulations on her appointment to the role.

The Sub-Committee was informed that her role did not retain responsibility for housing but was linked through early intervention and prevention of homelessness as well as rough sleeping. The service primarily managed different programmes which enabled people to help themselves access homes and provide support in other aspects of their lives.

The report focused on housing in the borough and registered providers who addressed housing need. In attendance were representatives from housing providers as well as housing support. The guests presented on their item, providing information on key issues as well as outreach work.

#### **OPTIVO**

The Chief Operating Officer provided an overview of their portfolio which focused on three key areas, with most of their homes being for general needs tenants. There was also a commercial aspect of their portfolio held for student and key worker accommodation.

In Croydon, Optivo had over 3,400 homes in the borough. There was currently a large development programme underway to build 1500 homes a year, with 550 homes on-site in Croydon with an ambition to have over 1000 homes by 2023 on a shared ownership and affordable rent basis. Optivo were keen to continue to support families and people on lower incomes into affordable homes.

The Sub-Committee was informed that Optivo had partnered with Croydon on the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> pilot to provide homes and had been investing in financial inclusion and sustainable tenancy schemes. The Housing Association (HA)

had 450 households in Croydon in receipt of Universal Credit and were experienced in working with this clients group having formed an understanding of the challenges faced. They had also been successful in working with residents on an employment and skills programme. Optivo was a large local employer who supported the local economy, with their head office and repairs services located in Croydon.

There remained many challenges for the HA such as budget constraints, and staff restructures, rebuilding and re-establishing strong working relationships and working with the Police and the Council to rehome families experiencing gang violence. There had been funding cuts and grants per homes remained low in comparison to the cost of building due to the increased costs of construction. Welfare changes due to uncertainty over benefits also remained a challenge for residents.

There were opportunities to invest in Croydon and as one of the Mayors strategic partners, Optivo had secured an additional £145m to invest in affordable homes. Additionally reviewing tenancies and being in the position to offer affordable homes to local residents.

Through the valued partnership with the Council, the HA had three key priorities which included building new affordable homes, provision of support to vulnerable residents and working together to strengthen communities.

### **Croydon Churches Housing Association (CCHA)**

The Chief Executive gave an overview of their portfolio advising that they held 1500 properties over four boroughs, with a large proportion of these properties in Croydon. There was an emphasis on providing more homes which had been a priority over the last 5 – 10 years and there was now in place a programme to build 50/60 new homes per year.

The regeneration plans for Croydon were positive, however as Croydon became more attractive to developers, competition for land increased with unit costs rising significantly. This had made it more difficult to produce affordable schemes at the London affordable rent and in order to do this they had to be supplemented with more shared ownership schemes and sales. CCHA had benefited from the opportunity to deliver larger schemes and was being offered sites of up to 40 homes which was better for resources and management costs in comparison to smaller schemes.

The introduction of the new Senior Supply Officer role had been welcomed, received positively and has had an impact. There was a programme of over 100 homes on site with 70 in Croydon alone which will be delivered in the next few years. They were committed to growth and acknowledged the demand for homes, although being able to respond to this remained a challenge.

CCHA had 212 residents on Universal Credit (UC), the process had been difficult for them, which in turn has impacted financially on CCHA. 14% of households were on UC and rent arrears for these residents were high at an average 8.25% in comparison to just over 2% for other residents. The welfare

debt advice saw 141 residents last year with figures predicted to increase in the forthcoming year.

The process of UC remained a challenge for residents and was not limited to the rigorous form filling, but also the four to six week period of waiting for benefits to be paid. As a result it could seem that the system was setting up residents to fail as the delayed payment caused significant arrears to accumulate at the beginning of tenancies. Residents were benefiting from the Croydon Council hardship fund but this was limited and could not be relied upon to last indefinitely due to funding cuts.

Challenges remained from the number of incidences of drug and substance misuse reported, were on an increase and were working closely with police and neighbourhood organisations on this matter. The main threat to CCHA income was in supported housing, as a large proportion of their portfolio was supported housing, however funding cuts were creating instability due to a move to provide more statutory services. A complete review of supported housing was needed in order to optimise the services they have and they will be working with the Clinical Commissioning Group on this.

CCHA had limited access resources and partnership was key to further development and delivery of their objectives. They remained committed to the community of Croydon.

## **CAYSH**

The Chief Executive gave an overview of their services which as a supported housing provider dealt particularly with young people aged 16-21, exploring the different ways to manage the complex needs of those they supported. CAYSH were a local Croydon based organisation whose main objective was to provide safe accommodation for young people facing homelessness, provision of support and advice to enable independent living and sustainability.

The organisation as well as the Council realised that young people needed a different approach, with intervention required at the earliest opportunity to ensure that they did not become the families or households that face homelessness in the future. In order to do this, targeted work was carried out on prevention as well as safeguarding. Croydon was commended on the work that was being carried out to create high quality outcomes for its young people through its commitment to appropriately centred solutions.

The organisation utilised service users as ambassadors who were employed and could identify what kind of responses and intervention would be most beneficial to shape the service.

CAYSH provided the following range of services:

- Community liaison work
- Floating Support



- Drop in Centre
- Supported Housing
- Supported Lodgings
- Concierge

The organisation experienced many challenges, including the following:

- Rising Population.
- Increase in Complex Needs.
- Increase in Mental Health population in young people.
- Lack of affordable homes.
- Welfare benefit challenges.
- Recruitment issues in managing and managing pay levels

### **Thames Reach**

The Lead Manager gave an overview of the charity who work with rough sleepers. Within the borough they had a contract with the Council to go out and find rough sleepers to encourage them into one of the hubs to work on referrals.

Issues have been identified in the car parks around the borough with around 19/20 people bedded down on any given night. There had been difficulties experienced in moving rough sleepers on, getting them into employment and accessing services or working with organisations to help them off the streets as some were resistant to offers despite the availability of support.

There was also a growing issue with rough sleepers that are EEA nationals due to high level of support needed and the charity had been working on assisting them with routes back home as well as help with services such as housing and substance misuse. The work in partnership with the Council had been significant as Croydon was one of the few London boroughs funding beds for this client group who had no recourse to public funds.

There had been extensive work with the Council to source provision of accommodation for rough sleepers to move into, but this as well as the process of universal credit remained a challenge.

Other challenges faced included that whilst the staff are trying to put in place an action plan for every rough sleeper to help them off the streets, the team only consisted of 5 people who conducted 4 outreach sessions per week, which meant that resourcing was limited.

The opportunities that would be provided through the Housing 1<sup>st</sup> pilot was welcomed and it was encouraging to see the partners working together extensively to bring this to fruition.

In response to a Member question about what to do when encountering a homeless person, Thames Reach advised that most homeless people knew what services were available and when encountering someone begging the wider public needed be aware of the options available so that they can direct them to CRISIS or one of the other outreach organisations. It was more difficult to get a homeless person to engage with services if they were successful in begging in certain locations around the borough.

It was questioned whether in light of diminishing public sector income, what plans or innovations the organisations had to diversifying their finances. Optivo responded that there was a small programme of outright sales to subsidise the rented programmes. More importantly the organisation had been looking at how they are operating services to deliver increased efficiencies whilst reducing costs. The use of technology had been vital to diversifying and promoting efficiencies.

CCHA responded that some elements of their business had seen a small move to private sales to cross subsidise affordable rent. In supported housing they had moved some schemes to a leasehold model. As a result of Universal Credit there was a balancing act between collection of rent against welfare and debt advice. On resourcing, partnership was key to the success of the organisation and they had been selling finance and forecasting services to smaller associations that had growth ambitions.

It was further questioned how the organisations worked with the Council to integrate services for recipients of UC to support them on the pathway into employment and their responsibility to ensure that integration was effective.

Optivo responded that in the last three years they had seen a 12% reduction in residents on benefits across their portfolio. They were passionate about the social impact of UC and getting people into work. They worked in partnership with the Council to identify opportunities for jobs and skills pathways into employment. They had initiatives in the Croydon works job brokerage to get people into the work supply chain and supported the Croydon Partnership and the Whitgift job pop up business school.

CAYSH responded that all the young people they worked with wanted somewhere to live and a job which they equated to feeling safe and secure. One of the initiatives in place was a partnership with Andrews Estate Agents who provided them with long lease properties, CAYSH suppressed rents for a period which allowed the young person to save for their deposit. Universal Credit could often act as a disincentive at the start of the claim as a result of large arrears built up. It then impacted upon their ability to secure the accommodation and personally limited their ability to travel to their place of employment, purchase work clothes or equipment needed to carry out their duties.

The organisation had been working with the Council and local businesses to tap into the growth of the borough and would like to increase access to businesses such as the Westfield Development through work experience and apprenticeships.

CCHA responded that they promoted back to work programmes, apprenticeships and work experience for residents. They had also employed residents. As a small housing association they were able to provide one on one support where needed to support residents into employment.

A Member questioned what opportunities there were to build on an asset based approach and how this could be implemented. What recommendations could be made for the future of Gateway service, what steps were taken to measure resident satisfaction and if the organisations paid staff the London living wage?

CCHA responded that the only recommendation for Gateway was for more to be done to attract homelessness initiatives and services to the Borough. Resident satisfaction figures for 2018 were disappointing at 74% in comparison to 86/88% the previous year but this was due to issues with estates services contractors. The organisation did pay the London living wage and this extended to contractors used including those for cleaning services who also paid the living wage. They had an active asset management system to ensure that all properties were maximised.

Optivo responded that through an asset based approach they had been exploring ways to maximise resources, work collectively and establish whether homes were sustainable. They were also being more open and transparent with partners, other housing providers and pooling resources to make outcomes more viable. The latest resident satisfaction figures was 96% and had previously been 98%.

The only recommendation for the future of Gateway was to increase the collective ways of working to improve services and for all partners to pool increased resources on safeguarding. An affirmative answer on the payment of the London living wage would be provided after the meeting.

CAYSH responded that their satisfaction figures were over 70%, they did pay the London living wage and were trying to diversify into an asset based approach, where possible through grant fund raising. The recommendation for Gateway services was for the focus to be kept on the young people they were trying to support.

Thames Reach responded that their satisfaction survey was completed on 4<sup>th</sup> November and details would be provided after the meeting. Difficulties in recruitment due to the extra money recently offered by commissioners to most boroughs increased competition and as a result they were unable to take advantage of the extra money offered until the end of the financial year. A definitive answer on the London living wage would also be provided after the meeting.

In response to a concern raised regarding the plans in place for alternative accommodation for the residents of Lansdowne Road Hostel due to the pending demolition when building work started, the Director of Gateway stated that this was a priority. Officers had been working with residents on pathways to different accommodation such as social housing, sheltered accommodation, and private sector housing.

It was noted that in relation to the Night Watch services, a rough sleepers initiative funding had been secured and the Council was working with the private sector to develop an increased offer for single homeless people. A social lettings agency was launched in the Gateway service in April 2018 with 75 landlords signed up who were willing to offer tenancies. The Gateway service would provide the much needed wrap around service needed once they had secured their tenancy.

A Member questioned what progress had been made on fixed term tenancies which the Council had discussed abolishing.

Optivo responded that they would be recommending at their next board meeting to move away from this approach as there was no evidence to support that it delivered benefits. Instead it would hinder mutual exchange which help people to move into appropriate properties and avoid the bedroom tax.

CCHA responded that only residents moving into large properties were offered this and a recommendation was also being made to the board to abolish this as there was no evidence of the intended outcomes.

The Chair questioned what work was being done to address the social isolation of vulnerable residents.

Optivo responded that they were working with sustainability teams on this issue. There had been an increase in hoarding cases identified and they had in place a team dedicated to identifying vulnerable residents. Data checks were being completed to identify people that had little or no contact and also residents that they contacted on a regular basis in order to measure instances of vulnerability. Fire compliance was taking place in complex schemes due to the lay outs and through working with fire authorities there was now a more detailed plan and consistent approach to safety.

CCHA responded that their staff had received adequate training and were able to identify vulnerable residents. As they were a smaller housing association, residents were visited once a week and a lot of mechanisms were not in place as they were not needed. Fire safety compliance measures had taken place and there was an extensive partnership with the London Fire Brigade in place.

Although the impact of BREXIT was unknown at this stage, the housing providers alluded that the biggest concern would be around construction and development.

The Chair thanked all guests for attending the meeting to answer questions.

In reaching its recommendations, the Committee reached the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

1. The Members thanked the registered housing providers and support for attending the meeting.
2. The Sub-Committee was disappointed by the level of detail provided in the report.
3. The Sub-Committee thought the Housing First initiative to be innovative and welcoming and looked forward to being updated on progress made at a future meeting.
4. The Sub-Committee felt that the work of the Gateway service was making a positive difference to the lives of Croydon residents.
5. Although welcomed, it was felt that the short term funding provided by the Government to Thames Reach would not be beneficial to their workforce in the longer term.
6. The Sub-Committee agreed that the housing providers should be congratulated for ensuring that their contractors paid the London Living Wage to their staff.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to:

1. Recommend to Thames Reach that more was to be done to attract and retain employees.
2. Recommend to Optivo, Caysh, CCHA and Thames Reach to continue to work to encourage their contractors to pay staff the London Living Wage.

**38/18 Work Programme**

The Sub-Committee **NOTED** the work programme for the remainder of 2018/19 municipal year.

**39/18 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

.....

.....

