

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

Meeting held on Wednesday, 20 July 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,  
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### **MINUTES**

**Present:** Councillors Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Chair), Councillor Kola Agboola (Vice-Chair), Adele Benson, Simon Brew, Amy Foster, Christopher Herman and Nikhil Sherine Thampi.

**Also Present:** Councillor Jeet Bains (Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration), Councillor Scott Roche (Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment) and Councillor Lynne Hale (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Homes).

**Apologies:** Councillor Luke Shortland

### **PART A**

#### **1/22 Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th March 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### **2/22 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Luke Shortland, who sent Councillor Nikhil Sherine Thampi as a substitute.

#### **3/22 Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### **4/22 Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

## **Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery Directorate Overview**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 15 to 22 of the agenda, along with a supplement, which provided an overview of the Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery Directorate to inform the development of the Committee's work programme for the coming year. The report was introduced by the Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery by way of a short summary.

The Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment thanked the emergency services and officers for their response across the borough and in difficult circumstances in the last few days. The Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment went through their initial priorities in post including Graffiti Removal, working with community groups, residents' associations, and parks Friends Groups. This work was to identify these groups' priorities and to rebuild trust and relationships with the Council. Work had begun on 'Clean Up Croydon' and the Veolia contract to identify issues and develop plans with officers.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration introduced themselves and stated that they were looking at improvements that could be made in the Planning Service with the Planning Advisory Service review due to be published imminently. The Sub-Committee heard that the Town Centre Regeneration plan was being updated to bring it in line with current circumstances.

The Chair stated that they would not be focussing on a number of areas as these would be substantive items at future meetings of the Sub-Committee or Scrutiny and Overview Committee. The Sub-Committee had attended an officer briefing on Grounds Maintenance and a summary of this had been published in the Supplementary Agenda as an Appendix to this item.

The Chair asked about departmental priorities and why these were so high level and lacked outcome focus; it was asked whether a business plan would be developed to focus these with concrete objectives. The Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery agreed that these were high level but that more detailed Service Plans had been produced by Heads of Service and these would all be reviewed as part of the business planning process to ensure these were in line with the emerging priorities of the Elected Mayor.

The Sub-Committee directed questions on 'Clean up Croydon' and asked when copies of the Service Improvement Notice and Plan for Veolia would be provided and were informed that these would be provided following the meeting. The Improvement Notice had been delivered in February 2022 and focussed on three key areas which were missed collections, repeat missed collections and delivery of containers; these had been a point of contention

and the notice was in line with the contract as part of the escalation process which had triggered the production of a Service Improvement Plan. There had been a 45-50% improvement in missed collections, although this did fluctuate, but was travelling in the right direction and regular conversations were taking place with Veolia. There were challenges in the industry around staff recruitment and retention as well as recruitment of HGV drivers. Incentives were in place to attract staff with bonuses and provision of HGV driver training. The Sub-Committee asked how performance data was verified and were informed that the data was reliant on the number of reports received and a small contract monitoring team who checked random samples to ensure Veolia were logging data correctly.

Members asked about false reports of bins 'not being presented' when collections were missed and heard that the reporting system had migrated away from 'My Account' to make reporting easier and included the option to make an enquiry which would lead to an investigation. The Sub-Committee were of the view that it was too difficult to report missed collections in some cases and that this should be improved. On narrow streets, Members heard that Garden Waste collection trucks were wider and could sometimes not access the same streets that other waste collection vehicles could, but additional measures were being considered for these streets on a case-by-case basis.

The Chair asked how sanctions were applied in the Veolia contract and heard that there were performance indicators linked to a performance bond which was paid to the Council at the beginning of the year and was paid back over the year to Veolia if performance monitoring targets were met. The Chair asked how many times the provision of the contract had been increased in proportion with the number of houses served and was informed that there was an annual review process built into the contract that took account of property growth.

Members asked about the commissioning strategy being developed for the new waste contract and whether there was consideration of bringing the contract in house; Members heard that this option was being appraised by the South London Waste Partnership and the commissioning strategy could be brought to the Sub-Committee in October/November 2022.

On Street Cleansing, the Sub-Committee asked whether there was a litter strategy and whether poor waste collection for flats above shops had contributed to a greater amount of litter on high streets and in district centres. Members heard there was not a litter strategy, but that expectations were covered in the contract. Flats above shops were a challenge, particularly in regard to storage of waste, and special collections for flats above shops had been looked at but had been paused due to COVID. This would be resumed to look at the best approach to waste collection for these flats and to combat residents putting out waste every day. The Chair stated that the issue is further exacerbated by permitted development rights leading to units above shops with inadequate waste collection facilities and asked if there were any plans to address this. The Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment

responded that these issues were being discussed with Veolia and would be fed into the retendering process to improve collections and reduce contamination of waste. In response to questions from the Chair, the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment responded that they were open to trials for collection of waste for flats above shops as suggested by local community groups.

The Chair asked whether the street cleansing schedule would be reviewed to take into account the waste collection schedule as better co-ordination of this could lead to a better perception of street cleanliness, and the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment responded this could be picked up in the new contract. On ward councillor visits to check the grading of street cleansing, the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment stated that they would look into reinstating this. The contract set a cleaning standard defined as 'State A' with no litter or detritus and for this to be maintained to 'State B'; the Director of Sustainable Communities offered to share guidance with photos to assist with the Sub-Committees' understanding of the grading. Street cleansing was monitored by officers, but Members and residents were encouraged to report areas where they felt grades were not being met. Large sweepers were still being used for A and B roads alongside smaller sweepers in local areas, as well as on foot litter pickers in district centres.

Members asked about the expiry of Parking Strategy; the Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the current parking policy had been formed around emissions, pay and display, and permitting – this needed to be evolved to take into account behaviour changes following COVID and to encourage residents away from using cars for shorter journeys. The new policy needed to be right for the Council and to drive the right behaviours around climate goals as well as dovetailing with development opportunities. The Head of Highways & Parking Services explained that data analysis was taking place to understand the current position and trends in Croydon and to align parking policy with these. On emissions-based charges and the adoption of Electric Vehicles (EV), Members heard the trend in lower emission vehicles would be accounted for in the strategy and electric vehicle charge points were being rolled out across the borough to ensure Croydon was ready for the future. The draft parking policy would be ready before the end of 2022 and it was hoped that this would be scrutinised by the Sub-Committee.

On Healthy Neighbourhood Schemes and plans to increase 'Healthy Travel', the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment stated the details of the programmes were being reviewed. The Chair asked whether bidding for the Department for Transport (DfT) Capability Fund had been made and was informed that this would be checked but was likely for boroughs outside of London, as London boroughs would receive similar funding through Transport for London schemes. The Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery informed Members that the Council would be seeking to secure funding from DfT and TFL, such as the recent Active Travel funding programme, as well as any other available funding programmes including the Levelling Up Fund for which a bid had been submitted.

Members asked for information on the large backlog of highways repairs and how these works would be prioritised within the capital budget. The Director of Sustainable Communities stated that there was a highway asset management plan that produced a state of the highway report which mapped where roads were in need of an intervention using a Red Amber Green (RAG) rating system to create a forward works programme. There was work ongoing to make a proactive preventative strategy that was not simply reactive, and that took accident statistics into account; a business case for highway investment was developed every year and the size of Croydon's backlog of highway repairs was not uncommon. The Chair asked if footways were prioritised lower than roadways in the context of trying to get more residents to walk; the Sub-Committee heard that footways were included in condition surveys and were prioritised on different conditions than roads which followed the prominence of roads from A road, B road, etc. Visual safety inspections took place to look for trips and necessary interventions alongside reactive maintenance on footways.

The Sub-Committee asked about the Out of Hours teams for parks and poor-quality responses which had meant police had needed to be called instead. The Director of Sustainable Communities stated that they were not aware of these issues and asked for any problems to be escalated but that any issues with smoke or fire should be reported to emergency services in the first instance.

The Chair asked about street lighting and if smarter solutions using solar and remote control were being considered. The Director of Sustainable Communities responded that solar powered bollards were in use and street signs that required lighting were using LEDs; street lighting was at a grade that could be monitored by a central management system and had provision for variable dimming with a dimming pilot for cost mitigation ongoing. An LED solution was being considered but it was thought that the current variable dimming pilot was delivering similar results and savings.

The Chair asked for more details on the Town Centre Regeneration governance model and heard that this referred to an officer board that had put in place, pooling different directorates to tackle town centre problems in a holistic way. The Sub-Committee welcomed the bid for Levelling Up funding for the town centre but asked about plans for district centres with the report stating that behaviours were changing and high streets needed to evolve and adapt to those changes. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration stated that there were aspirations to engage with and create new Business Improvement Districts. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration stated that Good Growth bid funding for regeneration had been successful for Kenley and South Norwood; recruitment into regeneration teams was ongoing but there were issues retaining staff. On 'Meanwhile' strategies, these were being developed for the Town Centre but there was not sufficient resources in the regeneration team to focus on other district centres currently. The Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery highlighted the need to work with private landlords and businesses

in district centres to bring vacant properties and retail units back into use. The Chair raised the possibility of taking control of vacant properties as had been suggested in previous drafts of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill; the Sub-Committee heard that the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities had not provided any update on this and it would likely be extremely difficult in practice if included in the final Bill.

The Chair asked for the key high level points of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review of the Planning Department and was informed that the review was detailed and included a number of recommendations; the report had not yet been received but was expected imminently and could be shared with the Sub-Committee alongside an improvement plan once written. Members heard that Croydon had a very busy department with high caseloads which led to capacity challenges, further exacerbated by the financial situation of the council. New processes were being investigated for validations as well as ways to improve productivity. It was acknowledged there had been a breakdown in trust with residents, with particular with regard to Croydon Suburban Design Guide SPD2, which made the work of the department more difficult. Cases of non-determination had gone up due to the backlog of applications and more information on this could be provided. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration highlighted the independent nature of the PAS and the quality of the report and work they had produced; there was a focus on enforcement looking at processes and resourcing, and changes were required in current practices. The Sub-Committee asked whether there were capacity issues in enforcement and heard that the team is just four staff, and the Team Leader of Enforcement post had been vacant for 10 months and was now filled by an agency member of staff due to national shortages in enforcement officers. Members heard that there did need to be clear priorities of what was and was not enforced as a priority and the enforcement plan would be updated.

Members asked about parking income targets and the impact on the departmental revenue budget in 2022/23. The Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery informed the Sub-Committee about changes in parking behaviours and reduced demand for parking services had created additional budget pressures since the beginning of the pandemic; transactions were returning but the value of income was not. There was significant fluctuation month on month and in period 1 the Council was predicting a £3.15 million pressure from reduced demand for parking services. The pressure in period 1 from other areas such as ANPR and increased compliance was expected at £1.75 million.

Healthy Neighbourhoods income built into the budget would likely be at risk dependent on the implementation time for each scheme. The Chair asked what was being done in regard to looking at what other parking authorities were doing and heard that data was being compared to assess trends in relation to other areas. On Freedom Passes and the Concessionary Travel Scheme, the Director of Sustainable Communities confirmed that the Council committed significant amounts of money towards these schemes and this included the majority of parking income. There had been a significant drop of

Croydon's contributions in this year which had helped somewhat, but as normal behaviours returned after COVID it was expected this would rise and this risk needed to be taken into account as part of the MTFS. There needed to be a wider conversation with London Councils about whether this scheme should be reviewed. There had also been a downturn in the number of on street PCNs issued but staff for enforcement had been increased and efforts to increase retention and recruitment in this area were ongoing.

The Chair asked for current and proposed fees covered in the recent Cabinet paper for this directorate, and it was confirmed that this would be provided. On the financial impact of landlord licensing, the Corporate Director, Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery stated that the previous scheme renewal had been rejected by the Secretary of State due to the lack of a Housing Strategy; work on a Housing Strategy was being progressed and there may be work to look at a new landlord licensing scheme in the future.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Sub-Committee were of the view that it was too difficult to report missed collections in some cases and that this should be improved.

**Recommendation 1: The Sub-Committee asked for better communications on the Council Website around how to report waste collection issues and for the option to 'make an enquiry' to be made more prominent.**

The Sub-Committee were of the view that more work needed to be done to improve trust in waste collection services and to improve the perception that services were improving and providing value for money to residents.

**Recommendation 2: The Sub-Committee recommended better data collection on areas where there were repeated missed waste collections that could be due to obstructions or narrow roads to inform a more proactive approach that was less reliant on reporting.**

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee asked for the Service Improvement Notice issued to Veolia in February 2022 to be shared with Members. Members also requested that the resultant Service Improvement Plan was shared once this had been finalised.**

The Sub-Committee concluded that waste collections for flats above shops were an issue and solutions on this should be fed into the review of the waste contract.

**Recommendation 3: The Sub-Committee recommended that the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment investigate pilots on waste collection trails for flats above shops.**

**Recommendation 4: The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council produce a Litter Strategy in line with good practice.**

The Sub-Committee concluded that there should be co-ordination between waste collection and street cleansing schedules to improve perceptions of street cleanliness and that this should be fed into the review of the waste contract.

**Recommendation 5: The Sub-Committee recommended Ward Councillor visits to assess street cleaning grading were resumed.**

The Sub-Committee were pleased to hear that the option of bringing the waste contract in-house was one of the options being appraised as part of the forthcoming review of the contract.

**Request for Information/ Work Programme: The Sub-Committee requested that Members be briefed on the Waste Commissioning Strategy before it is brought to a future meeting.**

The Sub-Committee concluded that any review of Healthy Neighbourhoods scheme should be reviewed by the Sub-Committee before a decision is taken at Cabinet.

The Sub-Committee concluded that there was significant strain on parking income and that the new parking strategy needed to incorporate current trends in behaviours and the adoption of low emission vehicles.

**Recommendation 7: The Sub-Committee requested clarity on timescales for the new parking strategy and for information on how this would contribute to over net zero plans.**

**Request for Information/ Work Programme: The Chair asked for a report to be brought to the next Committee with the position of the in-year budget for the directorate.**

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee requested that information on previous and proposed fees and charges for the directorate was shared ahead of the next the next meeting.**

**Request for Information/ Work Programme: The Sub-Committee requested a briefing on the highway maintenance plan to ensure that prominence was being given to the maintenance of footways as well as roadways.**

The Sub-Committee concluded that the directorate should look at opportunities to engage in more innovative partnership working with other authorities.

The Sub-Committee concluded that there were significant challenges in workforce retention and recruitment across the directorate, particularly in the



Planning Department, and noted that the Workforce Strategy would be reviewed by a future meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee requested that the full PAS Review and Implementation Plan are shared with Members in addition to an officer briefing.**

**6/22 Revocation of Croydon Suburban Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2 (SPD2)**

The Sub-Committee considered the report set out on pages 23 to 216 of the agenda which had been approved by the Executive Mayor at Cabinet and recommended the revocation of the Croydon suburban design guide supplementary planning document (SPD2) to Council. The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration by way of a short presentation prepared by the Head of Spatial Planning and Interim Head of Growth Zone and Regeneration.

Members asked for clarification on the implementation status of the London Plan 2021 and heard that this was in place as current policy, including the relevant housing and small site targets. The Chair asked about how identifying areas of gentle intensification related to SPD2 and it was clarified by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration that these were contained within the Local Plan and not SPD2, even though the desire to move away from density driven development was identified in the report as a reason for the proposed revocation. The Sub-Committee queried why revocation was proposed before replacement supplementary planning documentation on residential extensions and alterations was ready to take its place, as was thought to be plan making best practice and carried reduced risk of poor quality residential extension and alterations. It was further asked whether this alternative approach was considered. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration stated that once the political decision had been taken to fulfil this election promise, this was the best way to achieve it in the view of the Executive.

The Sub-Committee understood that since the SPD2 had been adopted in 2019, there had been a number of planning policy changes and that alterations to the document were needed. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration informed the Sub-Committee that legal advice had been that no authority existed for the partial revocation and this was not possible. Members were advised that new guidance on residential extensions and alterations would be written as soon as possible, taking into account planning policy changes on design codes and design guidance. The Sub-Committee were informed that policy on residential extensions and alterations was in place would the position (including local planning policy and the London Plan) should SPD2 be revoked. The Head of Spatial Planning and Interim Head of Growth Zone and Regeneration restated that there was still a development plan and guidance at a national and London Plan level in place that could be used in the absence of SPD2 to determine applications.

The Chair queried whether the new residential extensions and alterations guidance would incorporate changes expected at the London Plan level and heard that this was not the case and that the guidance would be brought forward as soon as possible and that national government's focus on design and design quality, the national design code and guidance would be taken into account; these emphasised local authorities producing their own design codes and guidance. The new document would be checked against any new planning developments and the priorities of the Executive.

The Sub-Committee requested that the fall-back guidance, on the London Plan and national level, that would be used in the absence of SPD2 be shared noting that reasons for application refusals often referenced SPD2. It was stated that without this it was very difficult to ascertain what risk residents would be faced with if SPD2 was revoked without new residential extensions and alterations guidance to take its place. Members were advised that this risk had not been assessed but were reassured by the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration that policy to determine applications was in place in the event that SPD2 was revoked. The Committee were informed that there had been a period of time, before the adoption of the Local Plan in 2018 and of the SPD2 in 2019, when determinations on residential extensions or alterations had been made using other planning guidance.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration restated that there were still ways to make decisions in the absence of SPD2. The Chair restated that they wanted to know the full risks of poor development that homeowners were exposed to and requested that the guidance that would be relied upon was sent to Members.

Members highlighted inequalities in planning and the difficulty for some residents in understanding the implication of policy to their communities and asked what consideration had been given to ensure all communities were able to interpret and understand planning applications and documentation. The Sub-Committee heard that the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration was passionate about communicating planning to local communities but agreed that this was a difficult and complex area to understand. Members heard that there had always been efforts by the department to talk to and meet with community groups and residents' associations which had been made more difficult due to resourcing and the pandemic; six monthly meetings with residents' associations had now been restarted to try to engage in partnership working and to disseminate information on the planning system. There were plans to restart the 'Urban Room' in the town centre, as had previously been done for the Local Plan consultation in 2018, as a way to reach hard to reach groups and young people on planning and regeneration. The Sub-Committee asked if there was data on where resident's associations and groups were located and the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration stated that this could be provided.

Members highlighted significant upcoming changes in the planning sector with the new London Plan guidance and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill (expected early 2023). The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration clarified that upcoming planning changes in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill looked at building on the existing planning system rather than revolutionary change and would provide for transitional arrangements. The Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration whether now was the right time for producing new planning guidance when this could result in abortive costs as the draft Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill could result in SPDs becoming redundant. An additional consequence could be the waste of officer capacity that is already under strain. The Chair also highlighted that the cost of producing the document would be met by reserves earmarked for the Local Development Framework / Local Plan review and asked how risky this approach was, as it could leave the work needed to bring the new Local Plan to adoption under-resourced. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration stated they felt there was a political mandate for the revocation of SPD2 but and that, in their opinion, there were equal risks to maintaining the SPD2 document and revoking it.

The Chair asked if issues with the SPD2 were around intensification in certain areas of the borough or character, and the Cabinet Member responded that any national or London Plan housing targets that the Council were required to meet would still be achieved; they were of the view that the SPD2 was a hated piece of guidance by members of the public and that it emphasised development over character.

The Chair acknowledged that both Mayoral candidates had promised to review the Local Plan and asked what plans were being created to ensure residents had a greater say in their area. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration responded that they were in favour of stronger community involvement and would like to look at how to keep residents better informed and educated on planning matters.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Sub-Committee regretted that there had not been an opportunity for Pre-Decision Scrutiny on the report before it was considered at Cabinet.

The Sub-Committee were concerned that revocation of SPD2 was being recommended to Council without the replacement supplementary planning documentation on residential extensions and alterations ready to take its place as was thought to be best plan making practice which was the process that had been followed for the South Norwood Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

**Recommendation 1: The Sub-Committee requested that the policy on residential extensions and alterations in national, regional and local planning framework that would be used to determine applications in the absence of SPD2 be provided to the Sub-Committee.**

The Sub-Committee were advised by the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration that there was a political mandate for the revocation of SPD2 but Members were of the view that the risks to residents of poor quality residential extensions and alterations in the absence of replacement guidance had not been appropriately assessed.

**Recommendation 2: The Sub-Committee requested more information on the timescales in developing and adopting the new documentation on residential extensions and alterations be provided.**

The Sub-Committee were concerned about the use of earmarked reserves for the Local Development Framework / Local Plan to develop the new documentation on residential extensions and alterations and the possibility of abortive costs that could leave the work needed to bring the new Local Plan to adoption under-resourced.

The Sub-Committee were concerned about inequalities of knowledge and resource on planning matters across different communities in the borough.

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee requested a map of residents' associations and organisations that the Planning Department were already engaged with which could be shared with ward councillors to help to build the knowledge base on planning within local communities and to identify new community groups for engagement.**

## **7/22 Housing Directorate Overview**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 217 to 224 of the agenda which provided an overview of the Housing Directorate to inform the development of the Committee's work programme for the coming year. The Cabinet Member for Homes introduced the paper with a short summary adding that close work with residents to deliver quality and value for money services would be their priority. The Sub-Committee were informed that this would be a process that took time but that a new Corporate Director was in place to bring stability and leadership to the directorate. Work was underway on re-procurement of the Responsive Repairs Contract which had been reported to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee before approval by the Mayor at Cabinet; the Residents' Charter had also been approved at Cabinet. There had been detailed discussions with the Housing Improvement Board regarding the Housing Improvement Plan which would be reshaped and reinvigorated incorporating the views of residents. A project manager had been appointed to look at Regina Road, as well as a member of staff to focus on voids and an officer to work on customer engagement.

The Sub-Committee asked about previous poor service provided to residents and asked whether there had been consideration of compensating residents; the Cabinet Member for Housing reminded Members that this had been a recommendation of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and was awaiting a response from the Mayor.

Members highlighted the burden on residents of private sector rents and poor-quality private housing and asked about licensing in the private rented sector. The Sub-Committee heard that the previous landlord licensing scheme renewal had been rejected by the Secretary of State as it was not backed by enough data and as there was not a housing strategy in place. The Cabinet Member for Housing stated that any new scheme would take time to develop and emphasised the importance of the private sector providing quality affordable housing. Members heard that there were examples of the Council prosecuting rogue landlords under other legislation and encouraged any known issues to be reported.

The Sub-Committee asked about plans to address backlogs of complaints that had been reported by tenants. The Cabinet Member for Housing explained work to catch up on complaints was ongoing but that the department was currently overstretched, demoralised and with a large number of vacancies. Progress was being made alongside development of key performance indicators (KPIs) which would also be reported to the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments informed Members that, on the homelessness side, it was known that there were common complaints, and these were being looked at to improve the strategies being used. It was explained that a different kind of service was required and there needed to be greater openness with residents about what was and was not possible.

The Chair raised concerns around the General Fund and other authorities placing people into emergency accommodation in Croydon; there had been previous pilots to address this but the results of these had not been fed back to the Sub-Committee. It was asked whether evidence-based work would be done to address this issue as it was well managed by other authorities. The Cabinet Member for Housing explained that there were many families in accommodation that did not meet their needs and noted the slow turn around and large number of voids. There were currently around 300 voids in the borough and data on this was poorly kept with records missing in some cases and an officer had been brought on to address this which would lead to lower costs on temporary and emergency accommodation as well as an increase in rental income. Current average turn arounds on voids were around twice what they should be.

Members heard that work had started on a new transformation plan on homelessness and temporary accommodation and there had been meetings with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities who had given positive feedback. There were two aspects to reducing pressure on the General Fund; the first was managing demand of placements to emergency accommodation and the second was moving people on to a permanent home. The transformation would look at an early intervention and prevention service and creating greater churn in the system. The Chair asked for this plan to be delivered to a future meeting of the Sub-Committee.

The Chair noted the focus on culture change in the report and asked that when plans on this were ready that they come to the Sub-Committee. On performance management of staff, it was highlighted that this had been an issue that had led to failures at Regina Road and it was asked how this would be improved going forward. The Cabinet Member for Housing noted that these issues had resulted from a lack of leadership and development of staff and that the employment of the new Corporate Director would be the beginning of this improvement journey. The Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement highlighted the need to invest in staff and systems that would allow for greater efficiencies in future. The Cabinet Member for Housing noted that there were fantastic staff in the service who deserved congratulating.

The Chair highlighted the lack of follow up contact with residents who had gotten in touch with the Council for help when at risk of losing their homes and highlighted the importance of document and information management. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments responded that there were a number of problems, with five different points of contact with the service and different information systems used by the directorate; there would be a move to an early intervention and prevention model which would hopefully help with these issues and provide savings in the future by preventing homelessness in many cases.

The Chair raised work done by 'Generation Rent' to produce best practice models on engagement with the private rented sector and asked whether this was something that the Cabinet Member would be willing to look at; the Cabinet Member for Housing responded that they would investigate this. The Sub-Committee highlighted that there needed to be greater partnership working with registered social landlords in Croydon.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The Sub-Committee felt that the report set out the correct priorities for the Housing Directorate for the coming year.

**Request for Information/Work Programme: The Sub-Committee requested that the Temporary Accommodation Transformation Plan be shared with Members and an officer briefing be provided at a future date.**

The Sub-Committee were of the view that recruitment, retention and staff capacity were still major risks within the directorate.

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee requested that the plan on Culture Change in the directorate be shared with Members when this had been finalised.**

The Sub-Committee felt that the report lacked focus on the private rental sector and felt that more could be done in this area.

**Recommendation 1: The Sub-Committee felt that there needed to be a greater emphasis on private sector rental accommodation and recommended that the work undertaken by Generation Rent be reviewed by the directorate and Cabinet Member for Housing to investigate best practice.**

**Recommendation 2: The Sub-Committee felt that there needed to be greater engagement and partnership working with registered social landlords to increase the numbers of residents moving from temporary and emergency accommodation into permanent housing.**

**Request for Information: The Sub-Committee asked that timescales for the Housing Strategy be provided alongside timescales for developing a new Landlord Licensing Scheme.**

The Committee were concerned about documentation and information management within the directorate and the possible risks that this created for residents at risk of homelessness.

**Recommendation 3: That greater detail on the proposed move to an early intervention and prevention model be provided to Members alongside additional information on information management.**

## **8/22 Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23**

It was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Councillor Foster that the meeting continue till 9.45pm.

**RESOLVED:** That the guillotine be extended by 15 minutes.

The Sub-Committee noted that the following items were in the draft Work Programme for the coming year:

- Future of Healthy Neighbourhoods
- Reviewing the Mayors Pledges
- Active Travel
- Veolia Contract
- Sustainable Communities
- Purley Pool Options Appraisal
- Environment Bill Responsibilities
- Environmental Enforcement
- Biodiversity Strategy
- Implications of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill
- Temporary Accommodation
- Train Services and Operators

The meeting ended at 9.42 pm

**Signed:**

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**Date:**

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