

Scrutiny Streets & Environment Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 4 October 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

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

Also Present: 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 20th July 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.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Agboola and Benson.

3/22 Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Foster highlighted that they had already registered an interest as an employee of the charity 'Living Streets' which promoted projects to encourage walking.

4/22 Urgent Business (if any)

The Chair explained that the Sub-Committee would be asking questions on the Financial Performance Report - Month 4 (July 2022) that had been

reported to Cabinet on 21st September 2022 as separate financial reporting on the Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery (SCRER) and Housing directorates had not been provided. Discussions with the Chair of Scrutiny & Overview and the relevant Corporate Directors would be held to agree a way forward on financial reporting to the Sub-Committee in future.

The Chair asked about the possible projected overspend of up to £19 million, noting that a large part of this referred to the SCRER department, and asked for this to be explained. The Corporate Director for SCRER explained that at month four, the department was projecting an overspend of £15.14 million; this related to under recovered income and largely to the various income streams that made up traffic moving and parking income. These included parking, civil enforcement, parking suspensions, controlled parking zones and new/planned Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) schemes.

There had been downturns in income due to changes in behaviours as a result of the economy, post-COVID society and reduced enforcement. It was noted that reduced enforcement was due to both a decline in offences and difficulties in recruiting to civil enforcement officer posts. There had also been delays for the implementation of Healthy Neighbourhoods and School Streets schemes.

The remaining areas of the budget related to under recovery of income in building control and development management, due to a downturn in activity. There were less planning applications and pre-application advice sought which had also effected the budget.

The Chair raised budget pressures from the provision of Special Education Needs (SEN) Transport and was informed that this had seen increased demand, and that there were additional pressures from contract inflation. Negotiations with providers were ongoing and a reserve was built into the budget to address contract inflation, and this may be used in future to cover some of this pressure.

The Corporate Director addressed the Private Sector Landlord Licensing Scheme and explained that this had been budgeted to achieve significant income but had been rejected by the Secretary of State due to the lack of a Housing Policy, but that work to address this was ongoing. The Sub-Committee noted these schemes were meant to be cost-neutral and asked why this had led to budget pressure. Members heard that the resources for Private Sector Housing had been scaled back.

The Sub-Committee asked about the income of the Planning Department and the Corporate Director of SCRER responded that the department's budget was made up entirely of income and so an under recovery of income was the result of reduced numbers of planning applications. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that there were different levels of fee income depending on the size of applications; householder applications had increased, and major applications had fallen leading to reduced income for

the department. Pre-application and Planning Performance Agreements were discretionary fee generating services provided by the department and were responsible for significant income and these had fallen in line with the number of major applications. National factors had contributed to this with a downturn in major applications since the pandemic. Planning Performance Agreements Fees had previously allowed the department to take on additional agency staff, but as these fees had been reduced, it was no longer possible to continue this at the same level.

The Sub-Committee asked whether refurbishment of buildings would be greener than new major applications. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration responded that there had been increased conversations with developers about reuse, but these usually still required an application. In Croydon, there was still a large amount of poorly utilised land and often comprehensive redevelopment was better as it led to buildings that met modern building standards and were more energy efficient. It was highlighted that all applications needed to be determined on their own merits.

The Chair asked about the Deficit Recovery Plan and why so little of this related directly to the SCRER department. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that all directorates were working on deficit recovery but, that as nearly 80% of the SCRER budget was income, measures to mitigate under recovered income needed to be investigated; as the net general fund budget was so small it made deficit recovery more difficult for the SCRER department. On the General Fund, it was explained that the spend was low at this point in the year as the lead in time for Capital Programmes was longer, but nearly the full budget was predicted to be spent by the end of the financial year. It was expected that whilst some Capital Programmes may start this year, they may carry on and be reprofiled into the next financial year.

On Housing, the Chair asked about the inability to recover Housing Benefit and it was explained that there were two parts to Housing Benefit, and one of these covered Supported Exempt Accommodation which came with higher costs which were not subsidised by the government. Members heard that demands on this were increasing and a project group on this was looking to develop a long-term solution for the Council.

On the Capital Programme, the Chair noted the reduction in the target for Housing Revenue Account spend and the Interim Head of Tenancy & Resident Engagement explained that the programme was being reviewed which had led to a slowdown in delivery. This was due to capacity at the Council, longer lead in times and the need to review the programme to ensure it was targeted in the right ways. Members heard that there would be a slow down on the Capital Spend towards the end of the year against the original budget. The Chair expressed disappointment that these funds would not be spent and noted that this was a year-on-year trend. The Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Homes responded that there would be a focus on spending this money wisely and ensuring data and stock condition information was correct.

Housing Needs Transformation Plan

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 21 to 26 of the agenda which provided an update on the development of the Housing Needs Transformation Plan. The Chair noted that Members had been disappointed in the lack of detail in the report which had made it difficult to analyse.

The Sub-Committee asked about the suggestion in the report that the service was not currently 'customer centric' and heard that the number of entry points to the service led to an inconsistent quality of advice and service for vulnerable people and that this needed to be addressed to ensure they were treated with kindness, respect and dignity.

The Chair asked for information on how many homeless residents were registered in Croydon and how many had been housed in and out of borough. The Head of Temporary Accommodation explained that on homelessness and emergency accommodation there were just over 3000 households but there needed to be data cleansing to verify these figures. This was a combination of households who had formally made a homelessness declaration, who formed the majority, and the minority had a 'discretionary arrangement'; around 80% were housed in borough and around 20% out of borough. Returns sent to the Government needed to be thorough and affected funding settlements that the Council received. The discretionary placements were largely care leavers who the Council had a duty to support, and the rest had not been supported to leave the Temporary Accommodation system.

On Temporary and Emergency Accommodation placements into Croydon, the majority of these were from Wandsworth, Sutton, Merton and Lambeth. The Council could not stop other authorities placing into the borough as long as they notified Croydon when this occurred.

The Sub-Committee asked about a court case the Council was appealing, referenced within the paper, and asked if it would have been cheaper not to appeal it. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that the Council had lost a High Court case which determined that anyone in unsuitable accommodation must jump the housing queue and be provided a permanent home within weeks; the decision also implied that the financial situation of a council would no longer be considered. Local Authorities across the country were very concerned about the implications of this case as it could lead to significant issues and it was regarded as a test mark case nationally.

Members asked if the Council could only pay landlords a statutory rate and the Head of Temporary Accommodation explained that pan-London rates were agreed to try and manage the market with rates negotiated at the same level. These rates stopped markets becoming over inflated when authorities placed residents out of borough.

The Chair asked why the report did not provide any financial information on the stated workstreams. The Head of Temporary Accommodation explained

that the starting position was to achieve savings of £1.8 million in the next financial year; some plans had been developed and some were still at early stages. It was noted that homelessness demand was likely to increase alongside the cost-of-living crisis which would provide some additional budget pressures.

The Sub-Committee asked about the possibility of there being higher numbers of people in emergency accommodation than previously thought and why good data had not been captured previously. Members heard that this was a historical issue and that officers were using five different systems for data capture, with some of these being manual. This was being corrected but would take significant time to fix and was needed to ensure accurate plans to achieve savings and manage demand could be formulated.

Members asked about how vulnerable people in private accommodation were helped and the Head of Homelessness & Assessments stated that currently the service was the last port of call but that the intention was to adopt an early intervention approach so that support could be provided to these individuals through a strategic, comprehensive, and multi-agency response to reduce the risk of homelessness.

The Sub-Committee asked about placements into the borough from other local authorities into substandard temporary accommodation and the possible reputational damage from this to Croydon. The Head of Temporary Accommodation responded that there was a legal requirement on the placing authority to do due diligence and check out these placements to ensure they were suitable. The Council did not have resources to check these placements themselves, but where complaints were received, this would be escalated to the placing authority.

Members asked about data cleansing and heard that analysis was being done across the piece to understand where the issues were in the data. Once data had been cleansed, this would allow for better strategic insights across the service which would then result in different responses such as occupancy checks.

The Sub-Committee asked about how the needs of vulnerable people were being considered when being placed into temporary or emergency accommodation. Members heard that there was a statutory test for vulnerability and that this had a high threshold. Data on needs was now being collected at a person's first contact with the service to try to ensure the best choice, advice, and outcomes for customers.

The Chair asked about residents who had been turned away from the service for not having an eviction notice and highlighted that this was contrary to the early intervention approach set out in the report; it was also noted that there was a lack of follow up from the Council when residents had been in touch with the service and it was asked how this culture would be changed. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments acknowledged that staff were still working with antiquated systems and explained that there would be cultural

change through workshops and various forms of training. The lack of training had been identified as a barrier to adopting early intervention which needed to be changed to ensure staff were proactive and could work with residents before eviction notices had been issued. The new service looked to ensure that residents met an officer on the day they came to the Council, who would remain assigned to their case and develop a personal housing plan. The Chair asked which workstreams covered this and commented on silo working in the Housing department. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that this was likely an inherited behaviour and changing this sat within the cultural change aspect of the transformation plan, although this was not covered explicitly in the report. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that there was a paper under this, which had not yet been shared with staff for consultation, which contained more detail as opposed to the high-level actions in the Sub-Committee report.

The Sub-Committee asked about the multiple IT systems in use and were informed that these would be consolidated into a single NEC system that the whole Housing department would use, with a planned go-live date of November 2022. The Head of Temporary Accommodation explained that the NEC system was being developed to replace systems across the Housing directorate.

The Chair asked about the timescales for recruitment of posts detailed in the paper and heard from the Head of Temporary Accommodation that the service was currently being restructured to streamline processes and use of resources; the additional resource identified in the paper were short term hires to carry out specific pieces of work for the transformation over a six-month period.

The Sub-Committee raised concerns about the quality of private sector temporary accommodation and asked how this could be improved. Members heard that the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) would allow temporary accommodation to be procured from specific vetted suppliers, who would sign up to a framework, and would help manage these relationships by monitoring certifications and stock checks. This would hopefully unlock capacity for staff to inspect sites where complaints had been received to gather evidence.

Members asked about timescales and how improvements to accommodation would be measured. The Head of Temporary Accommodation explained that it was hoped the system would be in place in 2023 and scoping work on suppliers had already begun; currently there were around 60 suppliers of emergency accommodation and there was a risk that some of these would not sign up to the new system and framework which would set out standardised expectations of the supplier which would be used to form Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Other authorities had used the DPS, and the Council was in dialogue with them about the benefits of the system and what they had learned during their implementation.

The Chair asked if all future placements would take place through the DPS with accommodation that had been checked in advance and heard this was

being done in a phased approach starting with emergency accommodation with other accommodation following later. The Chair asked what quality assurance was being done in the meantime and heard that, for new placements, inspections were already taking place; existing properties were not yet being inspected unless complaints had been received due to capacity issues in the service.

The Chair asked whether the implementation of the new NEC Housing software was on track, and the Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained there had been some challenges for the Housing Needs service; this was the first phase and data would be entered into the system once it had been cleansed. There had been delays to implementation due to diligence being done on risk management and to ensure the system functioned as required.

The Sub-Committee asked how the Transformation Plan managed the risk of increased pressures on the service from the cost-of-living crisis. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that there was also additional pressure from Ukrainian and Afghan refugees and that this would be very difficult to manage. It was expected that the new system would be more flexible to try to mitigate challenging circumstances for customers. The Chair asked if there were earmarked reserves and the Head of Temporary Accommodation confirmed that these were in place to deal with additional demand to the value of around £970k, and that meetings with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities and other authorities to horizon scan were ongoing.

The Chair asked about legal exposure and the risks of poor data leading to less grant than needed being claimed from central government. The Head of Homelessness & Assessments explained that there needed to be better training for staff but that judicial reviews would always be a risk. On data quality, Members heard that this was being mitigated by working with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, who were aware of the issues. Currently the grant level received was thought to be too low, but a reform of the Homelessness Prevention Grant, which changed funding formulas, was expected to also negatively affect Croydon's settlement; work to lobby the government to change this was ongoing.

Conclusions:

The Sub-Committee were reassured by the action already taken and the pace of change in the Housing Needs service. Members agreed that the direction of travel was positive.

The Sub-Committee requested that more detailed versions of the Transformation Plan, that included mapping of the various work streams, were shared once they were available.

The Sub-Committee requested more granular detail on the identified workstreams and the plans for cultural change.

Recommendations:

1. The Sub-Committee agreed that signposting of Housing Needs services should be improved on the Council website.
2. The Sub-Committee recommended that the service should commence a proactive communications drive to all residents in Temporary Accommodation to encourage reporting of poor conditions, which ensured that residents were reassured that reporting issues would not result in them losing their homes.
3. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Housing Needs service ensure that occupancy checks are conducted in line with best practice and trauma informed practice.
4. The Sub-Committee noted the interdependency between the Housing Improvement Plan work on voids and the Housing Needs Transformation Plan and asked that the directorate look at how the work on void turnarounds affected plans to reduce the time that customers spent in Temporary Accommodation.

6/22 Healthy Streets and Active Travel (including Healthy Neighbourhoods, School Streets, Vision Zero, Cycling and Walking Strategy) Update

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 27 to 34 of the agenda, and in supplements, which provided an update on the Healthy Streets / Active Travel Programme including (Healthy Neighbourhoods, School Streets, Vision Zero, Cycling and Walking Strategy). The Chair explained the background of this item and stated that a briefing on the implementation and monitoring framework of Healthy Neighbourhood schemes had been held before the meeting, with notes of this meeting published as a supplement. The Head of Strategic transport introduced the item with a short presentation.

The Sub-Committee asked how when Transport for London (TfL) assessed the performance of different boroughs on Active Travel and Healthy Streets, that the intensity of public transport and the prevalence of hills was taken into account. The Head of Strategic Transport responded that this was taken into account at the objective setting stage and TfL was beginning to recognise the difference between public transport availability in Inner and Outer London. Public transport availability in Croydon was not on a par with Central London, but usage was high compared to other Outer London boroughs. Croydon had been identified as having a high potential for journeys made by bicycle, however, the was not currently being realised. The Croydon Cycling Strategy addressed topography, about which there was little the Council could do, and the Head of Strategic Transport suggested this could be addressed through the promotion of e-bikes. The Chair asked about possible funding streams to bring e-bikes into the borough and heard that this was difficult currently but that it was possible this could be achieved through Section 106 funding and

the introduction of hire schemes. It was highlighted that e-bikes would require the same level of infrastructure as normal bikes.

The Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment about the manifesto commitment of the Mayor to review Healthy Neighbourhood schemes and the appearance that this had not undertaken. The Cabinet Members for Streets and Environment responded that a review of the original Traffic Management Advisory Committee decision had been undertaken and these were being implemented due to financial implications for the budget but with amended signage and road markings. The Sub-Committee asked whether this was contrary to the Mayor's manifesto and heard that the Council was going above and beyond in its engagement with residents to ensure schemes were sensitive. The Head of Strategic Transport explained the process that needed to be followed at the end of the Experimental Traffic Management Orders (ETMOs) and explained that this would be running alongside extensive engagement including independent polling, receipt of objections, street audits and drop-in sessions. A comprehensive review of Healthy Neighbourhood schemes would be presented to Cabinet after 12 months with suggested next steps at the end of the ETMOs.

The Chair explained that the engagement approach did not necessarily mean that schemes would be removed as the default position in national policy was that unless significant harm from schemes could be proven then they would be retained. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that whilst there was a presumption that schemes would be retained, officers would need to draw together all material factors in the final report to Cabinet about whether schemes should be removed or made permanent. Officers would use their professional judgement to form these recommendations alongside the results of monitoring, ministerial guidance and resident engagement.

Members noted that data was being collected on schemes now but asked what data had been collected before schemes were implemented to evaluate how well schemes had performed. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that TfL had encouraged very quick implementation during the pandemic which had restricted advance data gather. As a result, other data had been used to form the picture pre-implementation of schemes, and these included traffic flow information and TfL databases including IBus data.

The Sub-Committee asked why private hire and taxis were treated differently in Healthy Neighbourhoods and heard that the signage used for schemes meant that Taxis were exempt, however, private hire vehicles were not.

Members asked about what lessons had been learned from other boroughs, who had adopted Healthy Neighbourhood schemes, regarding implementation, monitoring, engagement, and best practice. The Sub-Committee heard that there was a strong focus on delivery in Croydon, and that with the available resources it had not been possible to engage more widely. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that the Council was seeking to follow Secretary of State guidance on engagement and what was achievable within the available resource.

The Sub-Committee asked about the polarising nature of some of the communications that had asked for objections and not views in support of schemes. The Head of Highways & Parking Services explained that there was a statutory six-month period for ETMOs to receive objections and that this was why this language had been used. The Chair stated that a binary approach was also reflected in other communications, such as for School Streets, and asked if there were opportunities to invite other forms of responses. Members heard that the polarised opinions on schemes had been noted by central government who had recommended that Councils went out to find representative samples of residents, separate from those who would be motivated to attend drop-in sessions, and residents who had not previously been reached to ensure representative views on schemes were assessed. On questions about how this sample of residents would be found, the Sub-Committee heard that professional companies in the engagement field would be used.

The Chair noted communications from a group called 'Open our Roads' referencing data from the Department for Transport (DfT) published in September 2022. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that this data had previously been referenced in the original TMAC report on Healthy Neighbourhoods but had only been one part of numerous considerations that had been included. In future reports on progressing ETMOs for Healthy Neighbourhood schemes, this data was relegated to the environment section as, in the intervening period, central government had drawn its own conclusions about what this data showed about the national picture. Croydon was not resourced to reanalyse this data, although it could cross reference with other datasets, and at the end of 2021 TfL had presented contradictory data on traffic levels and this was likely due to the way the two organisations modelled traffic data for local neighbourhoods. There were also inconsistencies between carbon emissions from road transport estimates from TfL and DfT, and it was thought that this was likely due to the way central government was modelling traffic on local streets in Croydon. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that messaging from local government was still strongly in favour of pursuing the Active Travel agenda.

The Chair highlighted the founding of Active Travel England (ATE) and asked if work would be done to standardise monitoring frameworks between ATE and TfL. Members heard it was clear how ATE would operate outside of London where the DfT had direct responsibility for funding of transport investment through local authorities, and ATE would be responsible for monitoring what was delivered. In London this was less clear, but it was unlikely that TfL would continue to fund Active Travel schemes for local authorities who failed to embed the DfT and TfL agenda, or who failed to deliver schemes to the standard that ATE would expect.

The Chair proposed that the meeting be extended to 10.00pm, and the Sub-Committee agreed.

RESOLVED: That the Sub-Committee be extended to 10.00pm.

The Sub-Committee asked what the key lessons were for ensuring that residents understood schemes that had been learnt from the implementation of the first tranche of School Streets. The Head of Highways & Parking Services explained that for the second tranche of School Streets, discussions had been held with school leaderships to ensure proposals were in line with what was wanted by schools before engagement went out to the wider community. The Chair asked if any other lessons had been learnt and Members heard that the need for advanced signage was vital. The Sub-Committee heard that for the first tranche of School Streets, informal consultation had been undertaken, and the results of this would be reported to Cabinet in October 2022; dependant on that decision it would then be decided whether to proceed with ETMOs. The Chair asked about how School Streets would be monitored and heard that work was being done with a third-party supplier and that monitoring would be installed on the schemes implemented by ETMOs in April 2022. Approval was being sought at Cabinet in October 2022 to continue this monitoring and to install air quality traffic monitors in the local areas of these schools.

The Sub-Committee asked about how Active Travel and Healthy Streets linked to wider policies around reducing traffic and road fatalities. The Head of Highways & Parking Services explained that additional funding had been offered from TfL for Croydon's third Local Implementation Plan (LIP3) and that this would include the implementation of road safety schemes. The Chair commented on current uncertainty until TfL funding settlements were known and asked how a more integrated approach could be adopted that told the story of these policies to residents. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that it was always their aim to link up these policies as part of a coherent strategic approach, but that there was often a tension between achieving this and responding to disjointed funding offers to implement schemes. The Corporate Director of SCRER acknowledged that more could be done to bring these policies together but that there were always efforts to link schemes to a wider strategic picture. The Chair acknowledged this and highlighted the importance of taking the emotion out of the picture and presenting the benefits of policies to residents as a cohesive narrative.

The Chair asked about the absence of street scene improvements as part of ANPR Healthy Neighbourhoods and possible ways that this could be implemented. The Head of Strategic Transport explained that this was an element that would be important in contributing to the long-term success of schemes. Currently these schemes were established under ETMOs and so it was difficult to justify the additional cost of street scene improvements. This was a part of a longer-term vision for the schemes to try to change the way these roads related to different road users. The Chair noted that all money recovered from breaches of ANPR Healthy Neighbourhoods was ringfenced for transport and used to fund Croydon's contributions to the Freedom Pass scheme.

Conclusions:

The Sub-Committee thanked officers for the very useful briefing on monitoring and engagement for Healthy Neighbourhoods in advance of the meeting and asked that once information on how monitoring data would be used that this be shared with Members.

The Sub-Committee concluded that the Council's webpages on Active Transport and Healthy Streets should be brought together to allow for this to be more coherent and easier to understand for residents.

The Sub-Committee concluded that there was a strong central government drive for local authorities to adopt Active Travel policies, but that this was not widely understood. The detail on how Active Travel England fit into this picture was also unclear.

Recommendations:

1. The Sub-Committee recommended that key stakeholders were identified and engaged before the implementation of any new Healthy Neighbourhood schemes.
2. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council look at developing a cohesive Active Travel policy that brought all these schemes together in a coherent and strategic way that provided a narrative that residents could easily understand.
3. The Sub-Committee recommended that there needed to be better communications with residents about the outcomes of Healthy Neighbourhood and School Street schemes that were in their localities.
4. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council investigate developing a Kerbside Strategy to work in an integrated way alongside the Walking and Cycling Strategies.
5. The Sub-Committee recommended that the Council investigate attracting an e-bike hire scheme into the borough, possibly through Section 106 funding.

7/22 Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Recommendations

The Sub-Committee noted the paper.

8/22 Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23

The Chair encouraged Members to submit any additional work programme items to the Clerk in light of a number of items moving to the new temporary Homes Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

The Sub-Committee agreed to bring the next meeting forward to the 8th November 2022 from the 15th November 2022 in order to allow time for recommendations made on papers to reach the Cabinet meeting on 16th November 2022.

The meeting ended at 9.54 pm

Signed:

Date:

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