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Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 11 December 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair), Councillor Robert Ward (Vice-Chair), Sherwan Chowdhury, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Joy Prince and Andy Stranack
Also Present: Councillors Hamida Ali, Oliver Lewis, Helen Pollard, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Niroshan Sirisena

PART A

27/18 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2018 were agreed as an accurate record.

It was highlighted that the information requested at the previous meeting concerning representations made on behalf of the Council for fair funding and an update on the implementation of a system to notify Members of S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy funding in their Wards had not yet been provided. The Chairman advised that the need to ensure a timely response to requests for information from Scrutiny had been raised with the Cabinet at their meeting the previous evening. The two requests from the meeting on 30 October would be followed up outside of the meeting and provided to Members as soon as possible.

28/18 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

29/18 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

30/18 **Fairfield Halls**

Neil Chandler, the Venue Director for the operators of Fairfield Halls – BH Live, was in attendance at the meeting to provide an update on the redevelopment of the venue and the future plans for the Halls once it re-opened. Prior to the start of the meeting a tour of venue had been arranged for the Committee, to allow Members the opportunity to view the progress made to date on the redevelopment.

It was confirmed to the Committee that the newly redeveloped Fairfield Halls would reopen in September 2019, with the website for the venue, including information about events, going live in January 2019. As it was noted that

there had been criticism on social media about the redevelopment, it was hoped that there would be support from the entire Council once shows started to go on sale in January. This view was echoed by the Committee who recognised the importance of the Fairfield Halls to the wider area.

In response to a question about accessibility for larger vehicles to deliver equipment for shows and tours at the rear of the venue, it was advised that this had been considered as part of the redevelopment plan. The Fairfield Halls was designed as a concert hall with a capacity of around 1,800 seats. Touring theatre shows require a much larger capacity to be economic and there are several such larger venues in the area that are more attractive to promoters and are better suited to hosting this type of show. It was therefore decided that it would not be cost effective to undertake the work needed and to focus on the strengths of the venue which are hosting classical and live performances, comedy shows and local community events.

It was questioned whether there would be any engagement with the Mobility Forum to test the venue's accessibility prior to opening. It was advised that this could be arranged, but it would need to be after the power was turned back on at the venue and the new lifts were operational. The new developments would mark a huge improvement in terms of access; prior to the redevelopment there had only been a single wheelchair lift at the front of the venue and as part of the improvements, all lifts were now accessible. The dressing rooms had also been made accessible, along with accessible toilets on each floor. There are also plans for a Changing Places facility in the venue. The Committee agreed to recommend that BH Live engage with the Mobility Forum and Councillor Andy Stranack on the accessibility of the venue prior to its opening.

As the Halls had previously been partially staffed by volunteers, it was questioned whether this would continue to be the case once it reopened. It was confirmed that BH Live did not use volunteers but used paid staff for the front of house functions. BH Live had high expectations of its staff and a strong focus on excellent customer service and as such was committed to paying the London Living Wage and had an ongoing commitment to training.

In response to a question about the offer for local community groups, it was confirmed that they would be charged half the full rate for the hire of the venue, which was lower than the previous pricing. The hire charge for community groups had been set after a lot of research into pricing across the local area, but it was recognised that it was not possible to please everyone. It was also acknowledged that there were other venues in the local area and as such it was important to ensure that community events were spread across the borough.

It was noted that once it reopened there would be a number of different spaces within the venue that could be hired for functions included the old Arnhem Gallery, the main foyer and the concert hall, which could all seat up to 300 people. This meant that there was potential for three different events to be held at the same time.

It was confirmed that seating in the venue had been re-upholstered rather than completely replaced, as complete replacement was not needed. The toilets in the venue had been upgraded, with some relocated to allow for increased provision. It was also confirmed that the Halls would be participating in the national scheme for carers, with the exact details of this to be finalised.

It was noted that catering would be a key area for the business and was an area that BH Live were particularly well known for. Within the venue there would be a bistro opened during the day and for event dining. There would also be a separate café and a foyer café as well. To ensure that the venue could cope with any demand for refreshments, more bars and selling points had been installed and an in-seat app to pre-order drinks which would be delivered to the seats had also been installed.

In response to a question about the plans for the re-opening and how it would be marked, it was advised that it would focus upon ensuring the celebrations were representative of Croydon as a borough now. It was suggested that it would also be important to acknowledge the history of the venue as well.

It was confirmed that the former Arnhem Gallery would be renamed the Croydon Rec when it reopened, with the foyer being renamed as the Arnhem Foyer. The renaming of the foyer would be marked by a civic event with representatives from Arnhem invited to attend in October 2019. A concern was raised about the name Croydon Rec, as it was felt that this could be misconstrued. It was agreed that this would be taken away for further consideration.

As it was highlighted that 2022 would mark the 60th Anniversary of the Fairfield Halls it was suggested that it would be great if events could be organised to mark the occasion. It was agreed that this was something that could be looked into.

Conclusions

In forming its recommendations, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Committee agreed that the re-opening of the Fairfield Halls was crucial to the economy of the local area and as such it was essential that it was successful.
2. The Committee agreed that the Venue Manager had presented what appeared to be a very cogent account of the business plan
3. The Committee had concerns about the accessibility of the venue and felt that further engagement was needed to provide reassurance.
4. Despite concern that may have been previously expressed, it was generally thought to be the case that all Councillors were supportive of the venue and were keen for it to succeed.

Recommendation

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that the project leads meet with Councillor Andy Stranack and the Mobility Forum to provide reassurance in regard to the accessibility of the venue.

31/18

Question Time: Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport & Leisure

The Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport & Leisure, Councillor Oliver Lewis, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Committee with an update on his Portfolio and answer questions arising.

The presentation was divided into four main sections, namely Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. During the course of the presentation, the following points were noted:-

Strengths

- The Library Service had been brought back in-house following the collapse of Carillion and a strategy was being developed for consideration by the Cabinet in early 2019 that would set out a clear direction for the library service going forward.
- There was a strong cultural sector within the borough, with a notable musical heritage. A robust bid for Cultural Enterprise Zone funding had been submitted by the Council, with the outcome expected shortly. It was also planned to explore the potential for using the Music City model in Croydon.
- There were 128 parks and open spaces in the borough, which was the highest number of any London borough and these were increasingly seen as important places to provide opportunities to improve people's wellbeing.

Weaknesses

- There was the ongoing challenge of the historical position of the parks maintenance budget, which as a non-statutory service faced continual pressure. However, plans were being developed to bring the grounds maintenance team back in-house, which may provide scope for future opportunities in this area.
- The lack of new burial land was becoming an increasingly pressing issue, with options being explored before maximum capacity was reached.
- The historically negative reputation of Croydon as a place to visit was challenging and was not something that could be easily changed.

Opportunities

- The opening of the redeveloped Fairfield Halls venue later in the year would provide a boost for the wider area.
- The Clocktower development that would start in 2020 provided a welcome opportunity to improve the provision of services offered from the venue.
- The St Georges Walk development opposite the Town Hall would include provision for a new town square.
- Croydon had the largest proportion of young residents of any London borough which helped to contribute towards the vibrancy of the local area.
- The Council had an opportunity to work with local sports provision to raise the profile and success of sports provision in the borough

Threats

- Although the Administration had placed a priority on cultural and creative activities being at the heart of community since coming into power in 2014, budget constraints would continue to put pressure upon cultural services, with it difficult to maintain services which were not statutory.
- Competition from other boroughs also presented challenges, with a need to ensure a diverse cultural offering to compete with provision elsewhere.

Following the presentation, the Committee were given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member about the areas within his remit. It was highlighted that the Lifetimes, Museum of Croydon was an excellent facility and as such questioned whether it was publicised enough. It was agreed that the museum was a fantastic resource which did a good job of telling the story of people in Croydon. It was advised that there had been a Clocktower Late event earlier in the year focusing on the people of Croydon involved in World War One. It was hoped that similar events could be held in the future. It was noted that the refurbishment of the Clocktower would allow for greater use of the facility.

It was questioned whether residents using allotments were reflective of the borough and whether usage was monitored. It was advised that allotments should be considered as an opportunity for cross cultural learning and although they were currently oversubscribed, there was more that could be done to promote them to people from different backgrounds.

It was also highlighted that the allotment fees in Croydon were currently the lowest in London. The fees were in the process of being reviewed, but it was envisioned that they would remain at the lower end of the scale in comparison with other boroughs, with the possibility of different pricing structures. As part of the review, work would also be undertaken to ensure that all Council

allotments were brought up to standard, with the provision of toilets and conveniently located water sources. This work was being undertaken with a view to other organisations taking on the responsibility for allotments.

As there was a waiting list for the allotments in the borough, it was questioned whether there were any plans to create more allotments, with an abandoned allotment site at Thorne Park in Kenley suggested as a possibility. It was agreed that the possibility of reopening this site would be taken aware for further exploration.

In response to a question about what the Council could do to encourage cultural cooperatives and social enterprises it was highlighted that the Council administered a small grants scheme aimed at helping small organisations put on cultural events, which were match funded from elsewhere.

It was questioned how work was progressing on the development of the Parks Masterplan. It was confirmed that work had been undertaken to establish what could be achieved at six of the parks within the borough, which had led to a wide range of options. The Council was now undertaking an engagement process with the Friends Groups of the respective parks to establish what options were most viable. Provisional plans include the possibility of a cricket pitch at Norbury Park.

In response to a question about possible capital investment in libraries, it was confirmed that potential options were being considered for Norbury Library, but there were difficulties due to the cost required to make the upper floors accessible. A Library Strategy was being developed which would give consideration to how the space within libraries could be best used. A request was made by the Committee to have the opportunity to provide input into the Library Strategy prior to any decision by the Cabinet. It was agreed that this could be arranged, with a meeting of the Committee required to be scheduled for February to allow for this to happen.

In response to a question about the opportunities for sponsorship of public buildings, it was advised that there was a cultural partnership scheme for businesses and individuals to give donations to cultural services, which had raised approximately £100,000 to date since its launch in September 2018. It was highlighted that the sponsorship for cultural services could be sporadic and it was important to focus upon matching potential sponsors to specific activities. Private sponsors would be very unlikely to support services or facilities perceived as council services

The redevelopment of the Fairfield Halls and in particular the delay in reopening the facility was questioned as well as how this had impacted upon the budget for the project. It was highlighted that the redevelopment of a 60 year old building with five venues in one site was always going to be challenging and as the initial work progressed it became apparent that the project would be more complex than originally envisioned, particularly the discovery of asbestos that needed to be removed. This additional work meant that the budget would be higher than planned at the start of the project.

In response to a question about the process for determining cultural grants applications, it was confirmed that any Groups wanting to apply would need to submit an application form, which would be followed up by officers with a further discussion of the application. The final decision on whether to award a grant or not would be made by the Cabinet Member in conjunction with officers. Plans were underway to add a greater structure to the process as the number of bids had increased with the success of the scheme.

In response to a concern raised about the limited number of parking spaces available at the Fairfield Halls, it was highlighted that as the venue was in the centre of the town it was well served by public transport options. There was also other car parking available within the town that people would be able to use if required. As part of the process for the reopening of the venue work would be undertaken to improve the wayfinding to the site from around the town.

The cultural heritage of the borough was highlighted and as such it was questioned whether there were any plans to give greater recognition to this. It was confirmed that plans were being developed in this area, including the possibility of a Musical Heritage Trail of sites of music heritage importance within the borough, this would be in the context of the wider Music City plans for Croydon.

The effectiveness of the byelaws in place at local parks was questioned, with a view taken that they were not easily enforceable and not reflective of current lifestyles with activities such as cycling banned. As such the Committee agreed to recommend to the Cabinet that a review of byelaws was undertaken to ensure that they were fit for purpose.

Conclusions

In forming its recommendations, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Committee were pleased to hear that plans were being developed to create an app which would celebrate the musical heritage of the borough.
2. The Committee welcomed plans to review the Council's allotments.
3. The Committee agreed that work was needed to ensure that the byelaws relating to local parks remained fit for purpose.
4. The Committee agreed to schedule an additional meeting on 11 February to enable it to undertake pre-decision scrutiny on forthcoming Cultural, Libraries and Voluntary Sector Strategies.

Recommendations

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport and Leisure:-

1. That plans to introduce the Music City scheme in Croydon should also include provision to celebrate the Borough's musical heritage
2. That a short briefing note is prepared for Committee on the status of the Allotment Review.
3. That a review is undertaken of the byelaws in place in the Council's parks to ensure that they remain relevant and fit for purpose.

32/18

Pre-Decision: Evening & Night Time Economy Strategy

The Committee were given the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Evening & Night Time Economy Strategy, which aimed to overcome the challenges facing local businesses and communities in Croydon's night time economy. Given that the Strategy covered areas in a number of Portfolio's, the following Cabinet Members were in attendance for this item:

- Councillor Hamida Ali – Cabinet Member for Safer Croydon & Communities
- Councillor Oliver Lewis – Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport & Leisure
- Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed – Cabinet Member for Economy & Jobs

During the introduction of the Strategy it was noted that it had been informed by seven night time walkabout events across the Borough to gain an understanding of the night time economy in different areas. From these it had been concluded that there were significant differences between the town and district centres, but signposting and wayfaring were common issues.

Potential actions for inclusion in the strategy included the addition of a Night Time Business Award in the Mayor's Civic Awards, the possibility of Night Markets, strengthening support for businesses and an exploration of the late night shopping offer.

Although the Council would not be able to directly affect every aspect of the night time economy it would be able to act as a key influencer. One area that the Council could directly influence would be through its regulatory services such as licensing and food standards. Community Safety would also be important to promote the perception of safety across the borough.

Current strengths in the night time economy included a number of diverse venues such a Ludoquist and Box Park, a good calendar of coordinated events in the borough and a well-established restaurant quarter in the Croydon. Weaknesses included the perception of crime and safety within the borough, inconsistent lighting along key walkways, transport links across the borough were not as useful as they could be in the evening/night time, litter and refuse collection needed to be improved, planning and licensing were

seen to be a barrier and there was a perception that the borough was in transition with a number of vacant sites.

Future opportunities for the evening and night time economy included the regeneration plans for the town centre, the reopening of the Fairfield Halls, planned public realm improvements which will deliver improved signage and the possibility of a university in the borough. Potential threats to the night time economy came from crime and the perception of crime in the borough, a lack of confidence slowing growth, falling income levels from Brexit, rising rents and business rate increases which placed further pressure on businesses.

It was noted that there had previously been a Night Time Economy Strategy in 2007 and as such it was questioned how the new strategy would differ from the previous one. It was highlighted that there had been significant change in the economy since 2007, with an increasing trend for low and no alcohol offer. The Council's Licensing Policy had been reviewed in the last year to take into account the changes in the night time economy, which had previously focussed on tackling the challenge from a clustering of licensed premises.

It was also noted that many of the challenges facing the night time economy were longstanding and the strategy would not directly provide the solution to these, but it should be viewed as a starting point for the Council to work with partners to deliver change. It was also important that the strategy was informed by businesses across the district centres.

The issue of women's safety and whether there was a barrier to women participating in the night time economy was raised and as such it was questioned whether a specific focus was needed in the strategy. It was highlighted that the Council had a good record in this area having been awarded White Ribbon Borough Status. Women's Safety was also a priority for the Police. It was agreed that further consideration would be given as to how this work could be reflected in the strategy.

It was noted that for the night time economy to be successful it needed to attract people from outside of the borough to visit. As the perception of crime had previously been raised as a potential threat to the delivery of the strategy, it was questioned what could be done to provide assurance that Croydon was safe place to visit. In response it was advised that although it was important to be mindful of the fear of crime, it was difficult to change people's perceptions. The Borough Commander for the Police had looked at this issue and changed the type of policing away from a strong visible presence as a result.

In response to a question about what the Council could do to support local businesses during the transition period when the new Westfield Centre was built, it was highlighted that there had been concerns during the building of the Westfield Centre in Stratford, but since it had moved to the area footfall had increased and businesses were thriving. There were a number of different ideas in development to promote local businesses and ensure there were a wide programme of events. Consideration was also being given to promoting events linked to festivals such as Eid and Diwali.

It was questioned whether there had been a disability representative on the Steering Group for the strategy. It was advised that there had not, but any input would be welcomed.

It was suggested that the strategy would benefit from increased data on the demographics of potential customers to ensure that it was pitched at the right level. It was advised that a survey had been undertaken as part of the process, but limited resources meant that large scale research was not possible. It was also emphasised that it was essential the strategy was delivered in conjunction with partners and included a shared vision of what it was trying to achieve.

In response to a suggestion that the report was more economically driven rather than culturally driven, it was highlighted that a Cultural Strategy was being prepared to sit alongside the Evening and Night Time Economy Strategy.

Although the report mentioned the diverse offer within the borough, a concern was raised that the report did not place enough emphasis on the diversity of the borough. It was acknowledged that the diversity of the borough could be made more explicit within the strategy as diversity was of key importance, with it highlighted that the Licensing Policy had introduced a need for a diversity of offer.

It was highlighted that the conversion of commercial premises to residential use had reduced the supply of potential venues and as such it was questioned whether consideration should be given to how best protect smaller venues. It was confirmed that this could be delivered through working with planning colleagues to ensure planning policies were aligned with the strategy.

In conclusion it was agreed that the Strategy needed to have a focus on deliverable outcomes which could be used to gauge its success, with a suggestion that SMART Objectives could be used. It was noted that the report would be considered by the Cabinet in either March or April 2019.

Conclusions

In forming its recommendations, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. It was recognised that a significant amount of work had gone into the development of the strategy.
2. The attendance of three Cabinet Members at the Committee meeting for the discussion of item demonstrated a commendable openness to challenge.
3. The Committee were keen to emphasise that deliverable outcomes would be key to the success of the strategy.

4. The Committee agreed that the strategy needed to represent the diversity of the borough.

Recommendations

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the respective Cabinet Members:-

1. That the Evening and Night Time Economy strategy had SMART, deliverable outcomes.
2. That the Strategy retained a strong focus across the borough and not just the town centre.
3. That the strategy reflected the diversity of the Borough.

33/18 **Work Programme 18/19**

The Work Programme was noted.

34/18 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Not needed.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

Signed:

Date:

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