Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Monday, 11 February 2019 at 6.30 pm in F10 - Town Hall

MINUTES

Present:	Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair); Councillor Robert Ward (Vice-Chair); Sherwan Chowdhury, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Joy Prince and Andy Stranack
Also Present:	Councillor Hamida Ali and Oliver Lewis

PART A

8/19   **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2019 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to the following amendments.

Minute 1/19, paragraph three be amended to:-

'The Chief Executive assured Members that information should be provided in a timely fashion when requested by the Committee. It was agreed that going forward requests for information would be listed separately from recommendations to prevent delays in the requested information being circulated to Members.'

Minute 4/19, first bullet point be amended to:-

'In light of ongoing cuts to Council grant funding from central Government, the Administration had taken a clear view that the Budget proposals for 2019/20 would seek the maximum increase in both Council Tax (without triggering a referendum) and the Adult Social Care precept to continue to protect frontline funding.'

Information Request

Having noted that the information on Cil funding raised on a Ward level, as detailed in the Cil Annual Monitoring report would be circulated to all Members, the Committee requested information from the previous three years for their respective Wards.

9/19   **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

10/19   **Urgent Business (if any)**

The Chair advised the Committee that following the unfortunate death of their former Council colleague, Maggie Mansell, a vacancy had arisen on the

Children & Young People Sub Committee. It was proposed that Councillor Callton Young would fill the vacancy.

The Committee **resolved** that Councillor Callton Young be appointed as a member of the Children & Young People Sub Committee.

11/19 **Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Development Voluntary & Community Sector Strategy for Croydon**

The Committee received a report, set out on pages 15 to 58 of the agenda, together with a supplemental presentation, that provided information on proposals for a Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy for Croydon. The Committee was asked for its comments, which would be used to inform the final strategy that would be considered by the Cabinet in March 2019.

During the introduction of the report, which was presented by the Cabinet Member for Safer Croydon and Communities, Councillor Hamida Ali, the following points were noted:-

- The voluntary and community sector was a massive asset for the borough with 819 groups registered with the Charity Commission and over 2,000 with Croydon Voluntary Action.
- The Council worked with the sector in a number of different ways including providing infrastructure support to build capacity, co-ordinating engagement, providing information on commissioning opportunities and a range of work through the One Croydon Alliance.
- The Strategy was being developed to coordinate the Council's work with the voluntary sector, to ensure that there was transparency in the Council's grant processes and that funding was balanced.
- The Community Fund was the main source of voluntary sector funding provided by the Council. It was last awarded in September 2016 with funding provided over a three year period. This was to provide greater certainty to the organisations in receipt of a grant. In total £1.9m of funding was being awarded per annum to 31 separate organisations.
- The Prevention Fund, was a grant aimed at organisations providing services for the over 65s. This fund awarded a total of approximately £500k per year to 21 organisations.
- Other funds available to the voluntary and community sector included the Community Small Grants fund, which had a budget of £100,000 for small grants up to £5,000. There was also Subsidy and Rate Relief and Community Ward budgets.
- As part of the process of developing the Strategy a consultation process had been undertaken, with 225 organisations responding and over 100 organisations communicated with directly.
- From the responses to consultation, the main threats to voluntary and community sector organisations included funding concerns, the lack of affordable premises and the availability of volunteers.

- As a correction to the published report, it was highlighted that 70% of organisations who had responded felt that their needs were not being met by the Council, rather than 30% which was stated in the report.
- The responses had also indicated that there was an expectation that the Council would facilitate collaboration, that the Council should be doing more to promote the sector, provide affordable space, provide funding and assisting with capacity building

Following the introduction, the Committee was given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member on the proposed strategy. The first question posed asked whether there was a need for a voluntary sector and whether the sector was providing services that should be funded by either the Council or the Government. In response it was advised that it was not for the Council to say whether there should be a voluntary sector or not. The sector did a lot of valuable work in the community that supported the aims of the Council. In particular there were instances where the voluntary sector could help in ways that the Council was unable, such as through peer support to reduce youth violence. The Labour Manifesto had given a commitment to maintaining the Community Fund and it was expected that this would be the case.

In response to a question about the number of Local Voluntary Partnerships in the borough, it was advised that it was proposed there would be six partnerships, with the application process underway. As a follow up it was questioned whether the Council could do more to raise public awareness of the Local Voluntary Partnerships. It was acknowledged that more could be done and that the strategy would help to direct the Council in doing so.

The Committee raised concern about whether there was sufficient evidence being provided of client satisfaction as part of the grants process. It was agreed that client feedback should be essential evidence in informing the Council about the actual outcomes arising from the grant funding awarded. As such it was questioned whether organisations had to provide evidence of client satisfaction and whether technology could be used as a means of collecting feedback.

In response it was advised that recipients of Community Fund grants held quarterly meetings with the Contract Managers at the Council. These meetings focussed on project delivery and would include evidence such as client feedback. Through the creation of the strategy, it would be possible to review how grant funding was monitored to ensure that criteria such as client feedback was prioritised.

The Committee highlighted that although there was a thriving voluntary sector in the borough, there may be certain areas where this was not the case and as such it was essential that the strategy gave consideration to how these areas of need would be identified and what could be done to address the shortfall. In response it was advised that the strategy would set out a number of priorities and it was expected that there would be a strand focussing on a community based approach, which would fit into the Council's own work on locality based services. Should gaps in provision be identified, then funding could be focussed towards these area. However, further thought would need

to be given on how best to support grass root organisations within local communities.

As it was highlighted that some organisations may have concerns about how grant funding was awarded, with there being a perception that grants were being awarded to those organisations best able to write funding bids, it was questioned how future grant awards would be determined. It was advised that funding would be based upon a clear set of criteria, against which bids would be evaluated. It was important to ensure that proportionality was used to ensure that a more rigorous process was used to determine larger grant applications. A team of officers from across the Council was used to evaluate the bids to ensure that the process was robust and transparent.

As it was noted that key performance indicators would be used as part of the monitoring process, it was questioned whether there were any penalties for those organisations who did not achieve their targets. It was advised that as funding was paid in instalments, if there was a significant issue then funding could be withheld.

As an alternative to the Council setting priorities it was suggested that consideration should be given to allowing the voluntary and community organisations to set the priorities themselves. It was acknowledged that the new Strategy would be an opportunity to bring organisations together to build trust and relationships. This would lead to greater opportunities to feed into the setting of priorities through allowing a greater flow of information.

There was a general level of consensus amongst the Committee that there was a need to reassess the approach to funding (including Rate Relief) particularly in regard to organisations who had received a similar level of funding over a long period of time. This would ensure that the funding was still being used to deliver the outcomes intended by the Council and would help to improve the transparency of the process. It was also agreed that there was a need for the Council to be clearer on what it was funding and the level of support the sector could expect to receive.

In response to a question about oversight of how Councillors spent their Ward Budgets, it was advised that although the spending of the budget was within an individual Councillor's discretion, guidance was provided and there were checks in place within the Communities team who processed the applications. Given that it was near the end of the financial year a request was made for data on the amount of money remaining in the Councillor Ward Budget fund for the current year.

Given that the availability of premises had been raised as an issue during the consultation it was questioned what support the Council could offer in this regard. It was acknowledged that it was a challenge for the Council to provide support as its estate was almost fully occupied. Where possible the Council did look to create community space, such as the former premises of the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust on Tamworth Road. It should also be considered whether rate relief could be made dependent on organisations offering space to other voluntary sector organisations as an incentive.

Information Requests

Information was requested on the amount of funds unspent in the Councillor Ward Budgets for 2018/19 broken down by Ward.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. That it was a very positive report and the full answers given by the Cabinet Member to the Committee's questions was to be commended.
2. The Committee agreed with the need for the Strategy, as set out in the report.
3. The Committee agreed that there were locality issues with some areas being underrepresented by voluntary organisations than others.
4. There was a concern that feedback from service users was not being taken into account, as it could be used to help measure the success of a service.
5. It was agreed that the Council should not be too prescriptive on the type of grants it offered.
6. The Committee had significant concerns about the benefit provided by the infrastructure support organisations supported by the Council and felt that the current relationship should be reviewed.

Recommendations

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Safer Croydon and Communities:-

1. That the final Strategy should set out how it will identify the unmet need within the Borough and how it will work with the voluntary and community sector to meet this need.
2. That more funding should be made available for grass root organisations than at present.
3. That feedback from service users should be taken into account when monitoring the outcomes from grant funding.
4. That feedback from service users should be used to inform future needs and priorities.
5. Within the Community Grants fund the majority of funding should be retained for three year contracts, but an increased amount should be retained for flexible funding as required.
6. There should be a fundamental review of infrastructure support organisations to ensure they were achieving their expected outcomes.

The Chair advised the Committee that given their significance it had been decided to split the next item into two and consider the Cultural Strategy and the Libraries Strategy separately.

12/19   Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Development of a Culture Plan for Croydon

The Committee received a report, set out on pages 59 to 64 of the agenda, together with a supplemental presentation, that set out information on proposals for a Cultural Plan for Croydon. The Committee was asked for its comments, which would be used to inform the final strategy that would be considered by the Cabinet later in the year.

During the introduction of the report, which was presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, Councillor Oliver Lewis the following points were noted:-

- The Cultural Strengths in the borough included a good cultural calendar of events such as Mela and the Pride Festival, the recent successful bid for Cultural Enterprise Zone status which had resulted in funding of £1m, the Cultural Partnership Fund and the strong musical heritage of the borough.
- Weaknesses included the boroughs reputation which effected investment and a historical lack of investment in culture in the borough.
- Potential opportunities included the population of Croydon which was young and diverse, culture should be seen as a means to delivering on other priorities such as the work on Prevention, the newly refurbished Fairfield Halls and the Music City project.
- Challenges included ongoing budget constraints and having to find an approach for Croydon that was distinct from other London Boroughs.

Following the introduction the Committee was given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member on the emerging Cultural Plan. It was highlighted that there had been a number of previous Cultural Strategies that had met with varying degrees of success and as such it was questioned what would help to ensure that the forthcoming Plan would be more successful. In response it was highlighted that the profile of culture had changed within the Council over the past five years with its importance being prioritised by the Administration. Evidence of this could be seen through the investment made in the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls and the Cultural Enterprise Zone.

A number of Members emphasised that it was important that the Plan reflected the different district centres within the borough. This was felt to be particularly significant with the forthcoming redevelopment of the town centre in Croydon. It was also agreed that although the report highlighted the large proportion of young people in the borough, it was essential that the strategy was reflective of the diverse age range in the population of the borough as well.

As it had been highlighted during the presentation that there had been initial success with the Cultural Partnership sponsorship Fund, it was questioned how much had been raised through the scheme. It was advised that at present £100,000 had been raised. The scheme offered a tiered package to contributors which was based upon the amount donated.   It was early days

for the development of corporate sponsorship for cultural events in Croydon and there was no set percentage being aimed for.

The Mayor of London's Cultural Strategy was highlighted and in particular that there was little mention of Croydon within the document, which had a predominantly central London focus. As such it was questioned what could be done to attract wider investment in Croydon. In response it was advised that while it would be beneficial if the Mayor's strategy had a greater Outer London focus, Croydon did make a good case to the Mayor, which could be evidenced through the Council being awarded funding for the Cultural Enterprise Zone.

In response to a comment that there needed to be sufficient big events arranged throughout the year to raise awareness of the cultural offer in the borough, it was advised that there would be more big events in Croydon over the next few years. With festivals such as Mela and Pride continuing to grow and the Ends Festival in Lloyd Park. The reopening of the Fairfield Halls also presented the opportunity to host high class musical events.

It was acknowledged that Croydon's reputation would be a risk to the success of the strategy and that this risk could be exacerbated by the redevelopment of a large part of the town centre over the next few years. As such it was highlighted that managing visitor expectations would be key, with a need for wayfinding to connect the different cultural elements in the town being essential.

In response to a question about plans for non-performance art it was highlighted that the Clock Tower redevelopment would increase gallery space in the borough. It was confirmed that there would be plans such for non-performance art and other forms of cultural heritage in the strategy. It was also highlighted that it would be important to ensure that support was given for more rehearsal and performance space within the borough.

It was agreed that it was essential for the strategy to outline what success would look like and how it would be achieved. The Cabinet Member advised that there would be key indicators set out within the strategy which would be aligned with the intended outcomes over the next four years.

The Committee agreed that there were many areas, such as the public realm maintenance and public transport, which would be key to the success of the strategy, which were also outside its remit. As such there was a need within the strategy to outline how it would interact with other strategies and plans to achieve its aims.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Committee concluded that the biggest risks to the success of the Cultural Plan lay outside of the control of the Cabinet Member for Culture, Sport & Leisure.
2. The Committee accepted that the Council was in a different situation to when the previous strategy was developed in 2010, but reiterated that the factors outside the control of the Plan remained.
3. The Committee agreed that the redevelopment of the town centre represented a major risk to the Plan and as such there was a need to focus upon culture in district centres.
4. It was acknowledged that many of the actions set out in the Cultural Plan would not be new, but would need to be clear on aspirations and constraints.

Recommendations

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

1. The Cultural Plan needed to take into account the Council's aspirations for the borough on a wider level and ensure that its own aims were aligned with these.
2. It was essential that the Cultural Plan clearly set out how it will interact with the other key strategies and plans of the Council and external partners to achieve its aims.
3. The Cultural Plan should be a three to five year plan to cover the period of major redevelopment in the Town Centre.
4. Actions in the Cultural Plan should cover the whole of the borough and be a reflection of the diverse population in Croydon.
5. That all actions should include SMART objectives to define how they will be achieved.
6. The Cultural Plan should be signed off by the Cabinet as a whole, with actions allocated to those Cabinet Members who will have a role in delivering it.

13/19   **Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Development of a Libraries Plan for Croydon**

The Committee received a report, set out on pages 59 to 64 of the agenda, together with a supplemental presentation, that set out information on proposals for a Libraries Strategy for Croydon. The Committee was asked for its comments, which would be used to inform the final strategy that would be considered by the Cabinet later in the year.

During the introduction of the report, which was presented by the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, Councillor Oliver Lewis the following points were noted:-

- Strengths of the library service included the management of the 13 libraries within the borough being brought back in-house, libraries were one of the few universal free services and were already hosting a wide range of events.

- Weaknesses identified included the age of the library portfolio which needed investment to bring back up to standard, the IT equipment was in need of updating and the marketing of the range of services available could be improved.
- Opportunities included some of the sites having the potential for redevelopment as housing, which would include the provision of new library facilities. There was also the possibility of having more flexible opening hours through the use of new technology.
- The challenges to making improvements were that any potential changes to the service could often be met with fierce public resistance and the significant cost of improvement.

Following the presentation, the Committee was given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member about the proposed strategy. The first question related to the use of data and whether the location of library users was mapped, with a view to finding out those parts of the borough where the service was least used. In response it was confirmed that data was available and used, but this was only dated from when the service came back in house. Having reviewed the data, most parts of the borough were within 1.5 miles of a library or 30 minutes travel by public transport.

In response to a question about the budget available to make library improvements, it was advised that a capital bid would be submitted in 2019/20 for IT improvements and initial refurbishment, but it was highlighted that the service had to live within its means.

In regard to library improvements, it was questioned whether there was any plans to completely demolish and rebuild any libraries. It was highlighted that there were plans in place for a new library in South Norwood. The current building had an inaccessible layout based over five floors, which presented a number of operational issues. As such this building would be demolished and be replaced by a new development, to be built by Brick by Brick, which would include a new library facility on the ground floor and housing above. The new building would also include a community space that could be used flexibly.

There was a general level of agreement amongst the Committee that the strategy should be ambitious and embrace new technology to improve the service. It was noted that the possibility of allowing customers access to the library outside of hours through the use of technology was due to be trialled. However this would need to be fully evaluated to ensure that managed effectively before being rolled out on a wider scale.

The possibility of providing more community space was welcomed, but it was cautioned that the hire charge would need to be affordable. In response it was highlighted that the current charge was £15 per hour, which was relatively affordable. At present the main issue to increasing community use was the current opening hours of libraries. Options were being considered to allow the use of South Norwood Library during the evenings and weekends. If this worked, then the possibility would be considered for other libraries, where it was viable.

The Committee was disappointed to note that the number of book loans had decreased and questioned the reason for this, along with possible strategies being considered to increase borrowing. It was agreed that it was important to continue to encourage reading and another summer book challenge for young people was planned, regular school visits were organised and an investment had recently been made in a pop up library to promote the service.

Although there had been a national decrease in the number of library loans, there were a number of possible reasons which contributed to the decrease locally including a historic underinvestment in the book stock and new technology meant that people were opting to read in different formats. It was advised that the Council would be re-joining the London Consortium of Libraries which would give user's access to over 6m books. It was also acknowledged that although there were a lot of good events organised by the library service, it was possible that these could be better marketed to make people aware of what was on offer.

It was agreed that although libraries should remain a place to access books, there was often a certain amount of space that was poorly used. To improve the use of libraries thought needed to be given to how best make use of this space and ensure it had a greater flexibility.

It was highlighted that there is a national framework for successful libraries, which was based on delivery of seven different outcomes. In order to inform the strategy, it was suggested that the libraries in the borough should be mapped against these seven outcomes and this evidence should be used as the basis for the new Libraries Strategy. It was also agreed that it would be important to ensure that the Libraries Strategy interlinked with other Council strategies.

Conclusions

Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. That library usage had changed from being primarily a book borrowing service.
2. That the seven national outcomes were a useful basis for understanding future provision.

Recommendations

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

1. That the national outcomes for library usage should be used as a basis for the strategy, with the service offered being evaluated against these outcomes.
2. That the strategy should be informed by usage data and other available sources of information.

3. That the Libraries Strategy should interlink with other Council strategies and plans.

14/19   **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not needed.

The meeting ended at 9.50 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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