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Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Wednesday, 27 April 2022 at 6.30 pm.

This meeting was held remotely, and a recording can be viewed on the Council's website

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair); Councillor Robert Ward (Vice-Chair); Leila Ben-Hassel (Deputy-Chair), Jade Appleton, Mike Bonello and Joy Prince

Also Present: Councillors Andy Stranack Callton Young

PART A

18/22 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

19/22 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

20/22 **Urgent Business (if any)**

Although there were no formal urgent items of business for consideration by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee at the meeting, the Chair had requested a brief verbal update for the meeting on the status of the 2021-22 accounts.

The Council's Corporate Director for Resources, Jane West, advised the Committee that the Finance team was currently working on closing the 2021-22 accounts and at present it was forecasted that once complete, there would be a small underspend which could be transferred to the Council's reserves.

Regarding the issue concerning the accounting treatment of some of the historic expenditure for Croydon Affordable Homes, it was confirmed that this was still to be resolved and discussions continued with the External Auditor. Once this issue had been resolved the 2019-20 account could be closed, allowing the 2020-21 accounts to be audited.

In response to a question about the progress made with improving the Council's budget monitoring systems, it was confirmed that although significant progress had been made over the past year, work was ongoing to ensure that staff with responsibility for budget monitoring had the necessary skill sets to provide effective monitoring. At present there was focus on reviewing the budget monitoring systems available within the My Resources software, with a view to increasing the amount of monitoring completed within the system.

Resolved: The Scrutiny and Overview Committee resolved to note the progress update on the delivery of the Council's budget.

21/22 **Call-In: Property Disposals as part of the Interim Asset Disposal Strategy**

The Committee considered a call-in request as set out on pages 5 to 38 of the agenda and the supplementary agenda concerning the decision to dispose of properties in New Addington. In introducing the item, the Chair explained the process for considering a call-in, confirming that the Committee needed to agree whether to review the decision and if it was decided to proceed, to confirm how much time it wished to allocate for the discussion of the item. The Committee agreed that it would review the decision and allocated one hour for its consideration.

The Chair went on to explain that there were three outcomes the Committee could reach following its review of the decision. These were: -

1. That no further action was necessary and the decision could be implemented as originally intended.
2. To refer the decision to the Cabinet for its consideration, outlining the nature of the Committee's concerns
3. To refer the decision to Council, if the Committee considered that the decision taken was outside of the Budget and Policy Framework.

At the outset of the item the Chair gave Councillor Andy Stranack, as the spokesperson for the call-in, the opportunity to outline his concerns on the

original decision. Councillor Stranack introduced Zoe Graham, the Welfare Officer at the New Addington Boxing Club, to explain how the disposal of the Addington Community Centre would impact upon the club. It was advised that the boxing club had been in existence for 50 years and in that time had move location within the local area four times, most recently to its current temporary home in the Addington Community Centre.

The boxing club was staffed by volunteers and had a predominately local, diverse membership, with its 250 members being from different backgrounds and having differing levels of ability. The club was open to children from 7 years old and helped its members in finding work and provided support for young people in avoiding the possible involvement in crime. Support was requested from the Council to assist the boxing club with finding a new venue once the disposal of the community centre had been completed.

Councillor Stranack followed up the introduction from the boxing club highlighting the difficulty of finding a new home for the club in the local area and questioning whether there had been any assessment of the potential impact on the local community if it lost the club. Concern was also raised about the masterplan produced for New Addington and whether the asset disposal would help the Council to meet these aims and achieve best value for council taxpayers.

Following the introduction, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance, Councillor Callton Young, was given the opportunity to respond, highlighting that the Council had opened the new £25m leisure centre in New Addington in 2020 as part of the masterplan for the area. The next stage of the plan was the provision of a health and wellbeing centre, which would be delivered by the NHS who would be buying the assets identified for disposal by the Council. In helping to deliver the health and wellbeing centre it would support the Council's commitment to improving the health outcomes of local people. Although the boxing club would be affected by the disposal of its current temporary home at the Addington Community Centre, the Council had made a commitment to helping the club find a suitable outcome.

The One Croydon Programme Manager, Laura Jenner, and the Head of Primary and Community Care Transformation at the South West London Clinical Commissioning Group, Daniele Serdoz, were in attendance at the meeting to provide an overview of the plans the NHS had for the site. A copy of the presentation provided can be found here: -

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/b10190/Agenda%20Supplement%203%2027th-Apr-2022%2018.30%20Scrutiny%20Overview%20Committee.pdf?T=9>

During the presentation, it was noted that Croydon had been successful in receiving £10m in estates capital to develop health and wellbeing hubs across Croydon in order to provide services closer to where people lived. To provide the hub in New Addington, a rigorous business case needed to be prepared by June 2022 and be built by 2024.

It had originally been planned to provide the health and wellbeing centre in a joint venture with the Council, but that did not go ahead. The Parkway Surgery had been investigated as an alternative location, but had not proven to be viable, which meant that the original site on Central Parade was the preferred option. Once delivered the facilities at the Health and Wellbeing Centre would include a diagnostic centre, GP surgeries and space for community services.

New Addington had been identified as an area of high deprivation particularly for children. It also had the highest rate of hyper-tension, smoking, depression and diabetes in the borough. As there were considerable health needs in the area, it was felt the provision of a Health and Wellbeing Centre was a good opportunity to address these inequalities.

The Council's Head of Estates, Asset Management and Facilities, Steve Wingrave, provided an update on the current position of discussions with the boxing club, confirming that it was secure in its present location at the Addington Community Centre until the end of the year. There was a recognition of the importance of the club to the local area and the Council was committed to working with them to find a permanent venue, with options being reviewed.

It was also highlighted that there was a short timeline for the NHS to secure the site to ensure the business case could be prepared by June in line with the funding timetable. The only difference to the version originally proposed in the masterplan for the area, was the removal of the housing element.

Following the introductions to this item, the Committee was given the opportunity to ask questions about the decision outlined in the report. The first question asked whether the future of the boxing club had been included in the equalities impact assessment prepared as part of the decision-making process. It was confirmed that the boxing club had not been included in the assessment as they had only been located in the Community Centre to provide a short-term solution while looking for a longer-term venue. It was noted by the Committee that club members may potentially be negatively affected should the club be homeless, but it was acknowledged that the Council had made a commitment to assist the club with its search for a new venue.

The Council had moved the boxing club into the community centre in 2020 as a temporary measure and had been working with the club over the past two

years to find a more permanent solution. In response to a question about whether it was likely to be possible to find a new home for the boxing club in New Addington, it was confirmed that two options within the community were being explored. These sites were within the Council's control, but further information could not be revealed at this stage until there had been discussions with the current tenants.

Given the need for the Council to achieve best value for council taxpayers when disposing of an asset had been questioned as part of the call-in request, reassurance was sought that this was being achieved. The Council's Director of Commercial Investment, Peter Mitchell advised the Committee that best consideration also had to consider the social impact and social value of a disposal as well as financial return. As the site would be used for a new Health and Wellbeing Centre in an area identified as having a high level of health inequality it was concluded that the asset was being used for the public good. As such, the Committee could be reasonable reassured that the best consideration threshold was being met.

In response to a question about whether legal advice had been sought about the issue of state aid in the disposal of the assets in question to the NHS, it was advised that as there was a transaction price that had been ratified independently, there was not be a concern about potential state aid issues.

There was acknowledgment by the Committee that provision of a new health and wellbeing hub in New Addington was an excellent opportunity for the local community that should not be missed. The requirement for a robust business case was also welcomed. However, it was highlighted that the need to meet tight timescales had previously been given for limited community engagement on asset disposals and going forward it should be built into any new projects.

The point raised about consultation on the proposed disposals was acknowledged, although it was highlighted that there had been a full engagement process on the original proposal for the hub. It was confirmed that there was no housing element in the current proposal and any future provision of housing would be subject to full consultation.

As the Health and Wellbeing Centre would be in New Addington, it was questioned whether it would provide any benefit for the wider area. It was advised that the proposed scheme was not aimed at simply providing additional GP provision for the local community. It would also provide a diagnostic centre that would benefit the wider area, along with community services that would also have a wider benefit.

Information was requested about the current medical facilities available in New Addington. It was advised that services were currently based at the Parkway Medical Centre which was old and there were a lot of problems with

the building. The option of demolishing this site had been explored, but it was concluded that it would be too costly and extending the site would be too disruptive.

In response to a concern that the potential cost of renting community space in the new Health and Wellbeing Centre may be high, it was advised that the local community would be consulted on what community facilities are located in the centre once the provision of the facility had been confirmed.

Following its questioning of the Committee discussed its conclusions on the call-in, which are outlined below. The Chair thanked all those who had attended the meeting for their engagement with the Committee's questions.

Conclusions

Following its discussion of this item, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee reached the following conclusions: -

1. The Scrutiny & Overview Committee concluded that reassurance could be taken from the answers provided and there was no grounds for referring the call-in to either the Cabinet or Council for further consideration. As such, the original decision could proceed as expected.
2. There was reassurance that the disposal of the assets to the NHS to provide a Health and Wellbeing Centre in New Addington met the criteria for the Council achieving best value for its assets.
3. The commitment from the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance and council officers to working with the New Addington Boxing Club to find a new venue was welcomed.
4. Confirmation was also welcomed that there were two potential options under consideration as a future home for the boxing club. The Committee agreed that the Council had a moral obligation to support the club with its search for a new home and should continue to assist with this search even if it was not resolved before the end of the year.
5. The concerns raised by the Committee about the level of community engagement on this asset disposal echoed previously raised concerns about how the Council consulted on capital projects. It was agreed that the process for delivering any such projects needed to be reviewed to

ensure there was sufficient time to build an appropriate level of consultation into future projects.

Recommendations

The Committee agreed to submit the following recommendations for the consideration of the Cabinet when it makes its decision on the final action plan.

1. It is recommended that the Council continued to support the New Addington Boxing Club until its search for a new home has been successfully concluded.
2. It is recommended that local Members are kept informed on the progress made with finding a new venue for the New Addington Boxing Club.
3. It is recommended that the process used by the Council when delivering large scale projects is reviewed to ensure that an appropriate level of consultation and community engagement can be built into the process as standard practice.

22/22 Annual Scrutiny Report

The Committee considered a draft version of the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2021-22, as set out on pages 63 to 104 of the agenda. A draft of the Annual Report had been included on the agenda to give the present members of the Committee the opportunity to comment on the content prior to the Council elections in May 2022.

It was agreed that the report presented a good summary of the work carried out by Scrutiny over the past year and thanks was given to the officers for their work in preparation of the report. It was agreed that it would be left with the Scrutiny Chairs to agree any final amendments before it was submitted to Council in July.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Leader, the Cabinet Members and officers for their participation in the budget scrutiny process over the course of the past year, noting that the increase transparency was welcomed.

23/22 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not required and all discussion of the Call-In item was held in public session.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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