

Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 31 October 2017 at 6.30pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katherine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);
Councillor Jan Buttinger (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Carole Bonner, Patsy Cummings, Stephen Mann and Vidhi Mohan

Also Present: Councillor Alisa Flemming, Timothy Godfrey and Shafi Khan

PART A

49/17 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5th September 2017 were agreed as an accurate record.

50/17 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

51/17 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

52/17 **Fairfield Halls Update Report**

Officers updated the Committee on the development of Croydon's Fairfield Halls. The Committee learned that progress of the main contract work had completed which was accomplished in Fairfield Halls in June 2017. The main contractor, Vinci Construction Ltd, was on site undertaking construction work including removal of Asbestos and demolition work was underway. The Committee was shown a video evidencing the work completed to date.

Future plans outlined that during February to July 2018 the external work of the building, the roof top work fit in and commission would begin. Vinci Construction Ltd proposed to complete the work in November 2018. The Council was also within the original budget that they had set with Vinci Construction Ltd.

The Committee was impressed with the progress of the site and the plans for Fairfield Halls. In a discussion of the achievability and timing of the completion of Fairfield Halls, officers highlighted that the challenges had all been uncovered. The officer felt confident that the main challenges would be removed within the contingency budget. There had been ongoing discussion with the contractor following consideration of the technical challenges seen on site that included the condition of the concrete.

The Committee further learned that the potential forthcoming risks included the condition of the ground, the removal of concrete and the foundations in parts of the building that had been there for such a long time. Planning permission allowed changes in getting equipment in to deliver the entertainment scheme. The team was working closely with BH Live to deliver a practical approach to the main concert hall and the Ashcroft Theatre, and to add an additional hoist to get on stage quicker, all of which would be cost effective. This major change mitigated the risk and lowered cost in the entire scheme. The BH Live team was to begin work on the fitting i.e. furniture, kitchen, IT equipment for the functioning of the building; and the operational work such as employment, marketing and communications, community engagement and hospitality. The Committee commended the update on timescale and budget.

The Committee was pleased to hear that there was disability access included in the planning to all areas in Fairfield Halls. The access included disability access to lifts, lobbies and doors with double access and all other amenities area.

The Committee was informed that Fairfield Halls was scheduled to be completed in November 2018 where the local community would see the opening in accordance to the operational plan. A full calendar for events in 2019 would be available as Fairfield Halls started its phased opening towards the end of 2018.

The BH Live presentation illustrated the vision of Fairfield Halls to which the new opening of the Halls would see better engagement with the community. The Halls would be good for the consumer and for business. Customer Service would also be delivered by means of a contact centre setting to convey better communication and quality with the community.

Officers from BH Live shared with the Committee that their vision was also around building community engagement by networking with a number of organisations such as schools, colleges, artists, buildings and having initial conversations getting to know what the local community would want to implement into the programme. Collaboration approaches had been made with Croydon College, The Brit School, Glenthorne School, Croydon Youth Theatre Organisation and Savvy Theatre Company. Their vision was also about the opportunity to attract different audiences attending different concessions inside the building including a VIP Experience, and as Croydon is a multicultural society, Fairfield Halls would need to appeal to audiences of all ages across a variety of genres. BH Live would also be keen to work very

closely with Croydon Council to identify opportunities to develop and encourage more stakeholders to participate in the rebirth of Fairfield Halls.

The Committee learned that BH Live was a social enterprise, the more profit BH Live made the more money there would be to spend on other activities. There was a budget which had been allocated for outreach programmes. The Committee heard that there were many ideas that would be arranged and programmed for 2019. This included a new website with integrated ticket line and other innovative concepts to generate more income, such as own-branded coffee sold on site.

BH Live reassured the Committee that they were an ambitious organisation and had a great opportunity to be part of the recreation of Fairfield Halls. The officers recognised that many of the attendees to Fairfield Halls may go to eat or drink at the bar and as Fairfield Halls would be an entertainment venue from afternoon through to the evening, it would be a destination for members of the public to “hang out” or relax and observe, as well as attend for events. Lots of concepts had been taken and adapted into Fairfield Halls, and BH Live had spotted gaps in developing the opportunity to deliver a service. In view of that, the Venue Director would be leading on the management of the day-to-day operations, event programming, community engagement, events and business events.

Officers from BH Live highlighted that the affordability of tickets for events at Fairfield Halls had been considered to include discounted rates for the local community of the young and the more mature.

The Members of the Committee welcomed the presentation as it covered all areas including the engagement with the community which was now reassured. Members of the Committee wanted to see that the BH Live dates were being achieved and that more information on the final design of Fairfield Halls and the programme was received in due course.

53/17 **Update on the Response to the OFSTED Inspection of Children's Services**

The report considered by the Committee provided an update on the actions taken by Children's Services following Ofsted's Inspection Report in September 2017 and an update on all key performances and practice improvements.

The Committee learned that post-Ofsted a new Commissioner had been appointed. The Transitional Action Plan was created and this followed and included the appointment of the Independent Chair. There had been a reduction of the executive director's span of control for six months to allow greater focus in implementing the improvement recommendations that had come from the Ofsted Report and for Children's Services to be reshaped overall. There had been managerial changes in Children's Services as a new director had been appointed to the position of Early Help and Children's

Social Care. An Independent Chair had also been appointed for the Local Children's Safeguarding Board, and a number of workforce actions had been taken including providing an additional social work team and a surge team to better ensure all children were safe.

The Draft Improvement Plan had been presented to the Committee to review and comment before it would be sent to the Improvement Board for ratification, and also to Cabinet for sign off, before it was presented to Ofsted in December.

The Committee was informed that appendix three in the agenda highlighted the top key indicators of improvement and the Improvement Board may add more to it. The list in appendix three set out the journey of a child, therefore the key indicators would be what was expected to be seen throughout a child's journey.

In detail, the Committee was to become aware of the plan which was focused on immediate action to ensure the safety of children. The Committee learned that significant pressure had been put on the service in particular the front door service, and as Children's Services were bringing more children into child protection, additional investment had been secured. Considerable investment to the Children With Disability Team and management had been highlighted and an additional social work team had been placed within the Care Planning and Assessment Service. The Committee learned that recruiting a new social work team had relieved pressure off other social work teams across the service. The Committee heard that two additional children's reviewing officers had been brought into the service, and due to the significant rise in legal proceedings, the service had requested for two additional lawyers.

The Committee heard that following the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Sub-Committee recommendation of the deep dive review on missing children and Returned Home Interviews, additional resources had been agreed to support the work. The business support staffing had also been resourced to reduce the administrative workload for social workers to focus more of their time on children and families.

In light of the Draft Improvement Plan, the Committee learned that this plan was a three year journey for Children's Services to move towards "Good" from where the Service sat currently. With a range of demands and challenges in Croydon, Children's Services objective would be to reach a "Good" standard within three years.

The officers had informed that Scrutiny was to hold them to account on delivery of the whole plan and specific actions that came out of the plan.

The Plan was based on four key areas:

- Practice
- People and Performances
- Partnerships
- Platforms

The development of the plan included significant staff engagement. Croydon Children's Services is known to have a high workload of children at risk of sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation, therefore the conditions for success would be to put children's lives at the centre of social workers' thinking.

The Committee considered the report, appendices and addressed issues on performance indicators, staffing, strengthening leadership, accountability and forward planning.

The Committee learned that Children's Services budget was £2.2 million. The service would be going through the budget process through 2018/19 to have an increased base budget for children and adults to get capacity and strengthen. There is a request to increase the budget to address the service improvement required. The Committee learned that what the service needed to focus on was prevention and intervention. The Local Government Association had looked at the spending of Children's Services and it would seem that Children's Services of other Local Authorities that are Ofsted rated as "good" spent a proportionately higher amount on prevention and intervention. Croydon Children's Services need to look at their funding to support families from the beginning of their journey before there was crisis. As such, a lot of funding had gone into the Care Planning and Looked After Children Services. The Early Help Team had also been created to help with the prevention of families going through hardship. Service performance would be monitored using the key performance indicators that would highlight the impact of interventions. Officers further outlined that development of the Early Help strategy was due by April 2018 and this would be when Children's Services would see how effective the Early Help strategy had been.

Members in the Committee highlighted that there had been difficulty in recruiting permanent social workers in the Children In Need Service. This was acknowledged by officers who informed the Committee that the Looked After Children Service and Leaving Care Service had stable staffing. The Children in Need Service was predominantly agency staffed. It was understood that there had been more agency staff due to the demand of staff required within teams.

The service however benefited from the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers who would become permanent staff at the end of their year, and current agency staff who would be encouraged to become permanent staff. The Committee heard that there had been a new Director of Human Resources appointed who was supporting help to the department with recruitment campaigns and pathways to ensure that social workers who joined Croydon Children's Services would receive the right level of training. The ASYE social workers assigned to Croydon Children's Services were due to complete their training, and these newly qualified social workers would have a protected workload of cases. The twenty-four ASYEs would graduate at the beginning of December 2017. Following findings from the Ofsted Report, clear and regular structured meetings would be held with

ASYEs and also with social workers in social worker forums. Additionally, a new cohort of ten ASYEs had been accepted to start within the coming week.

Members of the Committee heard that there was an expectation for caseloads to be manageable especially in the Children In Need Service.

The Committee learned that the service could not entirely eliminate any risk to every child across the Borough, but the challenge was to reduce risk by improving practise and performance.

Members of the Committee highlighted that the report noted social workers found navigating around the IT system difficult when completing assessments, to which officers shared some clarity that a small number of system improvements had been put in place to help with the configuration of records and reports; in addition, high level staff engagement post-Ofsted had recognised that additional service from Business Support was required. Officers addressed the point of assurance and accountability and noted that 'staff space' had been designed for all staff to confidently speak out and provide feedback which would identify areas within the service to review. There was an increase in staff engagement which formulated a staff reference group where eighteen members of social worker staff nominated themselves to represent all staff; and there were further plan for a staff survey to be completed four times a year.

In response to a question from the Committee, Cllr Flemming discussed her role included attending the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee and sitting on the Improvement Board. Cllr Flemming informed Members that she would have regular one-to-ones with the Executive Director of Children's Services, the Chief Executive and the Independent Chair to discuss progress on the Improvement Plan. Cllr Flemming had a direct sight of frontline practitioners and how the Improvement Plan would not only change the service for children but also for social workers. Cllr Khan discussed his membership on the Improvement Board, had attended meetings and had briefings with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning and the Leader.

The Committee felt that Members needed further information on some key performance indicators for the Children's Improvement Plan, particularly around the management and supervision of staff, and the nature of complaints within the service. The Committee acknowledged that officers behind the scenes had put a lot of work into the plan which should not go unrecognised.

The Committee proposed that more in-depth training for Members was required to increase their underpinning knowledge, particularly around the Children's Improvement Plan. Members also requested that external experts be identified to support the scrutiny of the plan.

Members concluded that the Committee should focus on specific areas and short term objectives of the plan. To this end, a formal request would be made for additional datasets to be provided for the Committee.

54/17 **Cabinet Responses to Recommendations**

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to recommendations made by the Committee relating to the Community Safety Strategy, at its meeting held on the 7 March 2017; and relating to the implementation of 20mph limit zones at its meeting held on 24 May 2017.

55/17 **Work Programme**

The Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny guided the Committee through the proposed work programme for the municipal year. It was noted that the schedule would be subject to change in light of the Ofsted report.

The Committee **NOTED** the work programme.

56/17 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Not required.

The meeting ended at 9:51pm.

Signed:

Date:

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