

## Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 30 January 2018 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber - Town Hall

### MINUTES

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

**Also Present:** Councillor Timothy Godfrey, Councillor Mark Warson

**Apologies:** Councillor Carole Bonner gave her apologies. Councillor Joy Prince attended in her absence

### PART A

#### 1/18 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2017 be approved as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Councillor Sue Winborne in the list of Members present at the meeting.

#### 2/18 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### 3/18 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### 4/18 **Children's Improvement Plan**

The Executive Director of People and the Director of Children, Family Interventions and Children's Social care were in attendance to provide an update on the progress of the Children's Improvement Plan.

The Committee was informed that that the following progress had been made since the last update:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPI) overview was presented at the December 2017 meeting of the children's improvement board for in depth analysis
- Key challenges such as high demand, work load of staff and use of agency staff continue to be addressed

- The Executive Director's primary role was centred on the improvement of children's services and as a result there had been a reconfiguration of directors that report to her to ensure minimal distraction from her core role in delivering the Children's Services Improvement Plan.
- 'Line of Sight' document had been produced which outlined the work and actions to be taken by the lead members of children's services to ensure compliance with regulatory guidance and practices.
- Regular auditing of cases
- Cross practice working
- Bi Monthly meeting with Assessed Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) social workers,
- Monthly meeting with social workers and front line staff

Members' questioned what had been done differently to communicate effectively with staff and to ensure that they were aware that their 'voice' was being heard. Officers responded that staff had been encouraged to make use of the staff suggestion box as a forum to give opinions on matters important to them. There was a staff group, aside from the social work forums where they were able to share experiences, group discussions and reflection opportunities were made available to ensure staff felt supported and are able to obtain different perspectives on cases.

The Committee further learned that the Executive Director of People had ensured that her presence was more visible to front line staff by regularly engaging to gain an understanding of daily issues and had been working with managers in each department on effecting a change of culture. The Director of Children's Services informed the Committee that time had been spent accompanying social workers to visits in order to have insight into the department's customs and practices.

In response to a Member question on recruitment and retention of social workers, officers advised that a new recruitment strategy had been agreed and a new children's social care microsite website had been launched to encourage recruitment of good social workers. The department was continually working to encourage locum social workers to take up permanent contracts into achieve a stable workforce in all teams.

The Committee was informed that the Croydon Staff Survey would close shortly and be ready to report on in a few weeks. Members commented that it was important that as many responses as possible were received as they were key to the improvement of the service. Officers advised that they had been working with human resources department and staff reference group to determine ways to encourage increased returns and participation.

The Committee learned that outcomes in the Adoption service were robust and compared favourably with national figures. In relation to Return Home Interviews (RHI), Members were informed that a full report would be presented at the Children's Scrutiny Sub- Committee the following week. Progress had been made in this area, as provisional figures for January 2018 showed a total of 80% RHI's offered and 66% taken up. The total rewards

scheme that was mentioned at the December 2017 meeting was still in the development stage with the hope of going to consultation in the next few months.

In response to a Member query on addressing challenges with staff caseload, officers stated that they were looking at ways to reduce pressure on social workers so they would concentrate on core areas. In order to achieve balance, there had been increased business support staff recruited to posts. There was ongoing work to ensure that the recording systems used were practitioner friendly. There had been extra funding made available for recruitment of good quality social workers.

Members requested an update on the partnership with Camden Council, key observations taken that could be applied to Croydon and lessons learnt. Officers responded that many lessons had been learnt and this was an ongoing process. Senior managers had visited Camden to observe their process and practices. There has been some work done with their Quality Assurance Department and they had supported Croydon with the audit of cases completed recently. The structure of the Corporate Parenting Panel of Camden has also been replicated in Croydon in order to set a different style and tone. An emphasis on strong youth voice and those working directly with young people such as foster carers had been incorporated through wider elected group representation to the panel.

Officers acknowledged that the support received from Camden had assisted in understanding how the failures in the service had occurred and had assisted in understanding how to improve outcomes for the children and families that were supported by the Council.

The Committee noted poor levels of achievement against some performance indicators to which officers responded that the detrimental impact on some performance indicators were as a result of the continuous increase in volumes of contacts and referrals to the service. This increase affected adherence to timescales of assessment and caseload figures. Following a review, deputy managers had been put into the assessment teams to address the increase of families requiring assessments.

The Chair thanked officers for their response to questions asked.

RESOLVED: That

1 The Children's improvement Plan and the Minister's agreement that Croydon should continue to manage its own improvement, in line with the Commissioner's recommendations be noted.

2 The progress on delivering the actions outlined in the improvement plan in December be noted.

3 The priority performance indicators for November 2017 be noted.

Councillor Timothy Godfrey, Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport was in attendance.

A presentation focused on the key areas of his portfolio and highlighted the following: Libraries, Museum Heritage, Arts and Culture, Leisure Centres, Sport & Physical Activity, Parks & Open Spaces and Registrars and Bereavement.

**Libraries-** The library service was brought back in-house following Carillion PLC's announcement of liquidation. There was an increase in visitors to the libraries of 2% on 2016/2017. There had been a range of programmes to attract visitors including working with local schools and provision of activities and events aimed at families and young groups. There were proposed works for the development of a new South Norwood Library building. Public consultation had taken place over the proposals. There had been a drive to regenerate Norbury Library and there was consideration taking place on options of creating a community space within the library.

**Museum & Heritage** – An exhibition to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Croydon School of Art was on display until April 2018 in the Croydon Clocktower. Community engagement was strengthened through the delivery of various arts exhibitions, displays and event and by supporting two Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded community led projects. Two apprentices had been recruited to the cultural heritage apprenticeship scheme.

**Arts & Culture** – Croydon had submitted its bid to become the first London Borough of Culture. The borough's first cultural congress was held in January and had attracted a large number of delegates. Various cultural events, projects and activities such as the light festival, had taken place successfully. The Fairfield Hall development had progressed as planned and BH live had been appointed to be the operator following the refurbishment.

**Leisure Centres** – There were proposed new partnerships with emphasis on traditional sporting provision, wider engagement and outdoor activity. GLL Greenwich had been amounted as the new contractor for leisure services as of 1 March 2018 following the end of the 10 year contract with Fusion Leisure Services. The mobilisation of the new contract would result in various developments such as the refurbishment of leisure centres, New Addington leisure centre development and the delivery of proposed accessible activities across various parks. Future priorities would include a focus on provision of free outdoor physical activities, supporting sports clubs and strengthening sporting infrastructure.

**Sport & Physical Activity** – There had been various successes in the last year, such as the London youth games where the borough came 8th. This year and going forward, partnerships with continue to be forged to facilitate participation. Norbury BMX track was built and was now open and free to use by all in the community. A range of activities had been coordinated in Wandle park as part of Lottery Heritage funding projects.

**Parks & Open Spaces** – The work on the Parks agenda was continuous and had seen various outcomes such as increased work with volunteer groups. There had been successful partnerships with groups on delivery of improvements to the borough's parks and open spaces. Various funding streams and grants had been accessed to support park improvements and promote community events. Six parks had been chosen, consultation had taken place with final plans developed on proposed improvement of the parks

**Registrars & Bereavement** – A new structure in the Registrars Service was implemented in September 2017 to improve customer service, capitalise on income and manage workload. The administrative software was due to be upgraded this summer and the digitalisation of some services was due to be introduced.

Members acknowledged the extensive work that had been completed to promote community activities and the events that had been provided such as the Thornton heath light festival which was well received and attended.

Members welcomed the decision for the library services to be brought back in house and questioned what would be done to improve the libraries, such as book stock and services offered. Officers responded that an overhaul of the library service was planned with a focus on connecting with the community.

In response to Member comments regarding the decline of cricket facilities, officers responded that this was an area that was lobbied regularly. The Council had been working with partners on facilities and venues to promote the sport.

Members acknowledged that the GLL contact was positive for the borough's leisure facilities but raised concerns on competition presented by the wave of budget gyms in the borough. Officers responded that this was a trend that affected all regions. The new contractor would look to compete through the provision of activities normally offered and diversification of services.

Members questioned Croydon's chances of being awarded the London borough of culture. Officers responded that Croydon was in a good position to be awarded and would continue to develop many of the programmes planned regardless of the outcome. The work completed and professional relationships forged would be maintained.

In response to a Member request for an update on Ashburton Hall, the Committee was advised that the development would be handed over to GLL and a full programme of works would be published thereafter. The long term prospects were promising with a proposed revamp of the site which included facilities for a café, gym, cultural and sporting activities as well as various events.

In response to a Member question on what remained the biggest challenge across his portfolio, the Cabinet Member responded that the development of Parks and Open spaces remained a challenge due to the funding, investment

and planning required to realise each sites potential and the time needed to imbed change.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for all the work completed in the last four years and in his previous role as a successful Scrutiny Chair.

6/18

### **Question Time: Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs**

Councillor Mark Watson, Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs was in attendance.

A presentation was provided to the Committee which focused on the challenges and successes on the key areas of his portfolio.

**Jobs-** The Committee was informed that Croydon had experienced a 2% growth in jobs comparable to London and National averages. The employment rate was slightly below the London average however the highest area of employment growth had been in the scientific sector. Croydon had been doing well in creating new businesses with 90% being small businesses. Croydon was in a good position as it continuously attracted new business to the borough. The good employer charter had been set up and was focused on employment of local people through the Croydon Works service who work with departments such as the gateway service to get local people into employment. This had made a fundamental contribution to the community and economy of Croydon. Croydon launched its apprenticeship scheme in 2017 and had employed over 85% of BME apprentices and 90% are Croydon residents.

**Growth Zone-** There had been many infrastructure projects developed and the Council had explored the use of grants to assist in the growth of the borough. The pedestrianisation of the high street had been successful. Many businesses were relocating to Croydon as a result of box park which has attracted hundreds of thousands of people to over 150 events that took place in 2017. As a result of concern over turnover of businesses in Box Park, support had been provided to the small independent businesses to assist in marketing themselves in order to attract clientele.

**Redevelopment of the Whitgift Centre-** This had been approved by the Mayor of London, funding was in place to manage operations whilst the re-development took place. There was confidence that the programme would be delivered and work would commence in 2019. As part of the section 106 agreement it was expected that 50% of jobs would be for local people and work was being done with schools and colleges to build a skills network. Employers were being encouraged to adopt the good employers' charter.

**Night Time Economy-** There were challenges in this area and there were ongoing works to establish a robust night time economy in the borough. There had been successful ventures such as the Good Evening Croydon event which has been an innovative and successful venture. Box Park had also

been a popular destination for people. More programs and event would be offered to attract people to the centre of Croydon.

**District Centres-** There had been ongoing work on the regeneration of Thornton Heath high street. Completion of the Purley car park upgrade was successful. New Addington redevelopment is in progress.

**Croydon Urban Edge** – The Croydon year of business was launched in January 2018 which aimed to encourage growth, development of business and creation of jobs in the borough through a programme of events. The events planned throughout the year would include training opportunities and lobbying of topics such as the way business rates were calculated for businesses in London compared to the rest of the UK. Through investment services to assist business to relocate and invest in Croydon, the focus had been on marketing, improved visibility and making the most of partnerships by maintaining reputation and satisfaction. Consultation took place with the community on projects such as the redevelopment of Surrey Street Market and investment in lighting, and the launch of the Sunday market which had attracted new traders.

Members raised concerns over the poor advertising of events at Box Park and that there was a need for increased diversification of events. The Cabinet Member responded that conversations had taken place with the CEO of box park regarding marketing and the programmes of events. The Council had also offered a package of support to business to encourage further events to take place.

Members asked if the Council would be working with Crystal Palace Football Club on their expansion and redevelopment programme to ensure that the proposed creation of 700 jobs would be directed at local people. The Cabinet member advised the Committee that Croydon Works would be used by the club to ensure jobs were directed to local people. There had also been work with the club and foundation to encourage provision of the London living wage for their staff

In response to Member comments on the impact of Brexit on the Growth Zone, the Cabinet Member stated that the uncertainty around the level of impact was a worry for the whole country. Croydon's current economic position was good and there was place a robust support programme of advice and guidance for business to steer them during this period.

In response to a Member question on the challenges to Croydon's economy in the next three years and the priorities to focus on, the Cabinet Member responded that managing the redevelopment of the Whitgift Centre should be paramount. Increasing the Night Time and evening economies must be addressed through attracting more businesses to the borough. An increase to the London Living Wage should also be a priority of focus in the coming year. Croydon should be proud of its Good Employer charter and must continue to encourage businesses to sign up to the scheme.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member for his detailed presentation and the Committee thanked him for his engagement with Scrutiny over the years.

7/18 **Work Programme**

The Committee NOTED the work programme for the remainder of the 2017/18 municipal year.

8/18 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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