

Croydon Council

For General Release

REPORT TO:	Full Council 26 February 2013
AGENDA ITEM NO:	6
SUBJECT:	BUSINESS REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY AND STRATEGIC OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
LEAD OFFICER:	Council Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, Director of Democratic & Legal Services
LEAD MEMBER:	Councillor Steve Hollands Chairman of Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee
WARDS:	All
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT:	The constitutional requirement that Council receive a Scrutiny Business Report.

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 Council is asked to note the Scrutiny work programme for February to May 2013 and scrutiny activity since the production of the last report to council in January 2013.
- 1.2 All Members are asked to consider what contribution they or their constituents can make to the topics selected for Scrutiny.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 This is the report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee, covering the period between 15 January and 15 February 2013 as required by the Constitution. The Constitution allows 10 minutes for this item.

3. DETAILS

- 3.1 This report provides an account of Scrutiny activity carried out by the following committees between 15 January and 15 February 2013:
 - The Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee
 - The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee
 - The Better Services Better Value Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4. **COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER**

4.1 The Council's Constitution (Part 4a Council Procedure Rules 3.05) states that the purpose of the Scrutiny Business Report is "To update the Council on Scrutiny activity since the previous Council meeting. Also to advise on any major issues that needs to be considered by Scrutiny. Incorporating (1) written questions and (2) oral questions on the items contained in the Business Report".

4.2 The Constitution allows 10 minutes for this item, which includes up to 2 minutes for announcements.

5. **FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

Not relevant for the purposes of this report.

6. **HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

Not relevant for the purposes of this report.

7. **EQUALITIES IMPACT**

Not relevant for the purposes of this report.

8. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Not relevant for the purposes of this report.

9. **CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

Not relevant for the purposes of this report.

Appendix 1: Report of the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee

CONTACT OFFICER: Solomon Agutu, Head of Democratic Services and Statutory Scrutiny Officer. 020 8726 6000 X62920

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: None

REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SCRUTINY AND STRATEGIC OVERVIEW COMMITTEE



Cllr Steve Hollands

15 January - 15 February 2013

1. Recent Scrutiny Committee Meetings

- 1.1 This report provides an account of Scrutiny activity carried out by the following committees between 15 January and 15 February 2013:
- The Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee
 - The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee
 - The Better Services Better Value Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2 15 January 2013 joint meeting of the Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee and the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- 2.1 The Leader of the Councillor, Cllr Mike Fisher, Chief Executive Jon Rouse, Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Resources Nathan Elvery, and Director of Finance Richard Simpson were in attendance to answer members' questions regarding the Council budget for 2013.2014.
- 2.2 Cllr Fisher explained that it continued to be a challenging period for all of local government. The Leader stated that the Council's objective was to protect frontline services and ensure the public receives the service it wants, while balancing this with the need to maintain the affordability of services. Members noted that £62million of savings had been secured over the preceding three years, and the Leader highlighted that without these savings further service reductions would have been necessary. Cllr Fisher emphasised that whilst the financial challenge facing Croydon was significant, he believed the Council was well-placed to address it. Following a Member's question, the Leader explained that the financial pressures on the Council would remain for several years to come and that as such the authority would be looking closely at everything it does to ensure the maximum value for money.
- 2.3 Members asked how the reduction in the Preventing Homelessness grant would be managed. The Leader recognised that housing provision was a significant issue for the authority and was disappointed at the funding reduction. He explained that temporary accommodation had already been secured but that the forthcoming cap on benefits could add to the demand for housing.

- 2.4 Members noted the efficiencies proposal in the report to save money through a reduction in children in care. It was asked how this saving would be achieved without having a detrimental effect on a vulnerable group. The Chief Executive explained that Croydon had more children in care than similar authorities and as such the focus was on preventative work and early intervention. The Council would be following a similar model to that used in Bolton that categorised vulnerable children into four groups based on their level of need. It was anticipated that by focusing on those children in the second and third categories, the Council would be able to reduce the number of children that progress to the fourth category and the need to place them into care. The Chief Executive also highlighted that the adoption service had significantly improved, which led to increasing number of children being adopted rather than in care.
- 2.5 The Committees discussed the Council's role as an education provider and noted a proposal to decrease funding for the traded services for schools. The Leader described how the Government viewed local authorities as having a decreasing role in education, but that he disagreed with such an approach. It was his view that local authorities had an important role to play in order to hold schools to account and ensure they deliver to the required standard. He conceded that this was becoming harder to do as more funding by-passed the Council and went straight to schools and expressed concern that the Council would be expected to act as soon as schools began to struggle. Members were also informed that the performance of the school traded services had exceeded expectations in terms of take-up and income. A prospectus of services for the second year had been produced and the Council was seeking to extend beyond municipal boundaries by offering services to schools in Bromley. The proposed reduction in funding therefore reflected the changes in anticipated income with an additional £607,000 of income expected in the forthcoming years.

3 5 February meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- 3.1 Members discussed the evolving role of the Local Authority in relation to education, in the light of new legislation and the academisation of schools. They noted that most were now self-governing, managed their own budgets and decided when to make use of local authority services. The Executive Director of Children Families and Learning emphasized the need to maintain good working relationships with local schools in order to act as effective champions of educational excellence in the borough in partnership with educational establishments. He added that while academies were accountable to the Department for Education, councils retained the responsibility for ensuring minimum levels of academic success in the borough.
- 3.2 It was noted that the changing role of the local authority would impact on the scrutiny of educational matters. Possible models for the future included scrutinising focusing on partnerships and principle-based leadership, with a view to adding value to educational services in the borough.

- 3.3 Members questioned officers on the impact of budget cuts and sought assurances that sufficient resources were available to secure children's safeguarding services. They were advised that despite significant cuts over the next two years, children's social care budgets would not be reduced. Officers detailed proposed efficiencies such as obtaining a greater proportion of children's foster carers in-house. They observed that early prevention represented a challenge: while these services were not statutory, reducing such preventive care was likely to be counterproductive.
- 3.4 Members questioned officers on the outcome of inspections in Croydon schools during the autumn term 2012, following the implementation of a new Ofsted framework in September 2012. This new framework set higher expectations of schools and was introduced after the previous framework was in place for only one year and this also set higher expectations of schools. Members discussed the DfE's expectation that a number of schools should become sponsored academies in order to achieve the progress required by Ofsted. They were also advised that the council's link advisor provided pre-inspection support to all schools in the borough, assisting them in gaining a better understanding of what a "good" rating constituted for Ofsted inspectors and in taking the appropriate steps to obtain such a result.

4 Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) on better Services Better Value

- 4.1 The Committee met on 29 January 2013 at the Surrey County Council officers in Kingston. The public consultation on Better Services Better Value had been due to conclude in December 2012. However, as a result of Surrey County Council joining the JHOSC and being given full voting rights, it has been agreed that the consultation process should be repeated, starting after Easter 2013.

5 Additional meetings

- 5.1 On 6 February, Cllrs Jason Cummings and Sean Fitzsimons, Chair and Vice-Chair of the Health, Social Care and Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee, met informally with Michael Bell, the new Interim Chair of Croydon Health Services NHS Trust, to discuss health issues in the borough as well as current and forthcoming Scrutiny work

WORK PROGRAMME FEBRUARY - MAY 2013**SCRUTINY AND STRATEGIC OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

DATE	TOPIC
26 March 2013	Street-based services
	The Council's Commissioning Strategy
	Scrutiny recommendations on Neighbourhood Watch: follow-up
23 April 2013	Riot recovery and regeneration
	The economic development of the borough
	The Scrutiny Annual Report

HEALTH SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

DATE	TOPIC
25 February 2013	CAMHS
	Health inequalities
	Healthwatch Update
	Update on NHS Finances JHSOC
	Update on the Better Services Better Value Programme
12 March 2013	Croydon Health Services NHS Trust
16 April 2013	The health and well being board
	Scrutiny recommendations on Speech and Language Therapy Services
	Update on NHS Finances JHSOC
	Healthwatch Update
	Update on the Better Services Better Value Programme
13 May 2013	NHS quality accounts
	Update on the Better Services Better Value Programme
	Review of 2012-2013 work and plans for 2014