

Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday 7 March 2017 at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber, the Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

DRAFT MINUTES - PART A

Present: Councillor H Ali, Councillor K Bee, Councillor C Bonner, Councillor J Buttinger, Councillor S Fitzsimons, Councillor J Prince, Councillor D Wood

MINUTES - PART A

A1 Minutes of the last meeting

The Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 10 January 2017 as a correct record.

A2 Disclosure of Interest

Councillor Bonner declared that she was a member of the Credit Union. In addition, Councillor Bonner declared that she was a member of the Safer Croydon Board and would therefore not take part in any questioning related to the Community Safety Strategy at agenda item 7.

Councillor Fitzsimons declared that he was a member of the Credit Union.

A3 Urgent Business (if any)

There was no urgent business.

A4 Exempt Items

There were no Part B items to consider.

A5 Question Time: The Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs

Councillor Ali introduced the item with a presentation on the Cabinet Member portfolio, which was described as an external facing one with a strong emphasis on partnerships. Included within the portfolio

were regulatory services such as Licensing and Food Safety, as well as resident-facing services such as the call centre and Access Croydon.

Opportunity and Fairness Commission

A key piece of work undertaken had been the Opportunity and Fairness Commission which had engaged with over three thousand residents in Croydon.

The Cabinet Member was responsible for implementation of the recommendations from the Commission in areas such as the community strategy and corporate performance framework. The Commission had also influenced the Croydon Congress work programme, and highlighted the challenges faced with implementing the London Living Wage (LLW) throughout the borough. The Committee were informed that Croydon was one of only three London boroughs to obtain LLW-friendly funding status.

A “Fair BnB” scheme, recommended by the Commission, was being piloted to match vulnerable people into lodgings in the Croydon. Housing vulnerable people was a particular challenge for the borough and Fair BnB, coupled with a “Friendly Landlord” scheme, was tackling the issue.

Priorities

The Committee were informed that the Cabinet Member’s priorities for the coming year included creation and implementation of a volunteering strategy to increase the number of volunteers in Croydon. Another priority was community cohesion, with “One Croydon” being considered as a brand name for a project that would focus on celebrating what residents had in common.

The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was being reviewed to ensure it was working effectively and was driving innovation and change. The LSP brought together the public and voluntary sector but there was a need to involve the private sector as well.

The Council’s Equality and Diversity objectives had been published and were based considerably on evidence accrued through the Commission. The objectives looked at how the Council delivered its services and the diversity of its own staff. One example of work being undertaken to address the latter issue was the creation of the Culture Board; led by the Council’s Chief Executive and made up of the broad staff networks already in place.

Social Security

The main response to the government’s social security reforms had been the creation of the Gateway service which had been undertaking ground-breaking work recognised by central government. A key change the Cabinet Member wished to see was

for emergency accommodation benefits to be dealt with outside of Universal Credit.

Another key project had been related to financial inclusion; supporting residents in financial difficulty. The Credit Union was an important component to this, and had been rebranded as “Croydon Plus” with a new website and new management. Croydon Plus also worked closely with the Gateway service where money management with residents played an important feature.

Community Safety was discussed briefly, as it was being considered as a separate item in the agenda. Key developments were flagged on the presentation slide, with the main issue being the new Mayor of London’s policy shift for policing on crime related to high levels of harm. Another important development in this area was the introduction of Public Safety Protection Orders (PSPOs) which could be issued by the Council.

Committee Questions

In response to questions from the Committee, the following was stated:

- Many of the challenges faced in the portfolio required partnership and the sharing of information with other organisations. The Cabinet Member brought political leadership to the partnership work to ensure key priorities were being targeted.
- Good progress was being made with the London Living Wage (LLW) and influencing other organisations and companies to implement it across Croydon.
- The most significant challenge facing the portfolio was the volunteering project. The Commission identified the key difficulty in this area was not to allow volunteering to dissipate but to ensure the work was joined up. Community cohesion was another significant challenge, with the Brexit referendum identified as a key negative to the work being undertaken. There had been a rise in reported hate crime but the Cabinet Member considered that this could be a good thing, that it showed more confidence by victims to come forward and report incidents.
- Officers from the Community department were commended for their work on the Croydon Congress. Key issues looked at in recent summits had included child exploitation and social isolation. At the end of Congress meetings, all those present made a pledge to take action points away to address the issues discussed. Following through with pledges was monitored by officers and a good example of this work was the Employers’ Charter. Four key actions were created from that Congress and employers were being systematically followed up to ensure compliance. As part of the review of the Strategic Partnership, the impact of the Croydon Congress would be

considered.

- The Croydon Congress was designed to have a long term impact on issues discussed, an example proffered was domestic violence where there was a long term vision of raising awareness in the wider community.
- Work was being done on the “digital divide” in the community with residents who are not literate in digital technology, primarily through the Go On Croydon project. There was also a call for the voluntary sector to take on the Council’s old ICT equipment which could aid in narrowing the digital divide in Croydon.
- The Gateway project was making a significant impact in coping with the effects of the lowering of the benefit cap, coupled with an increase in private rental sector rates. The changes were putting a strain on the Council’s resources, and evidence given to the Department for Work and Pensions Select Committee by Gateway officers made it clear the challenges being faced.
- A cornerstone of the Gateway service was to be proactive in contacting residents who were likely to be affected by social welfare reforms. An example was the “Community Connect” scheme that would bring the Gateway service to the doorstep of residents who could be affected.
- The Community Funding framework was structured around the key themes from the Commission. An output-funding approach was now being undertaken. An Online portal for applications had been established and there was no upper limit for how much funding could be applied for. The number and quality of bids resulted in approximately £140,000 worth of investment, funding 35 organisations and projects. Performance was being monitored with a particular focus on measuring outcomes which was done in partnership with the successful applicants.
- The Cabinet Member stated that the government’s integration policy had not been helpful and was a reflection of the challenging circumstances. Whilst central government had identified a need for communities to speak English, it had also cut funding to ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).
- The Council were working with frontline staff such as social workers and teachers with the Prevent strategy. Radicalisation was considered a safeguarding issue and not an opportunity to stereotype different groups. Far right extremism was a growing element of Prevent casework.
- An ongoing challenge for Croydon were the circumstances of having the largest population of young people in London and a predominance of low skill, low pay jobs. There was additionally inequality amongst Afro-Caribbean graduates who were more likely to be out of work than white graduates. The next Croydon Congress would be looking to the example of Scrutiny, with its “young people takeover”, in how to engage the young people of the borough into the process. An example was the Reaching Higher organisation in South Norwood

which was undertaking exceptional work with young people on a very small budget.

- The Cabinet Member expressed concern at the possible disenfranchisement of EU citizens in local elections in the post-Brexit era. It was stated that participation in the democratic process was crucial to community cohesion.

The Committee came to the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

- The impact of Universal Credit had been negative on the provision of emergency temporary accommodation and put vulnerable residents at risk of not getting emergency accommodation when it was needed. The Committee endorsed the Council's campaign to change these rules.
- Many thousands of Croydon citizens will lose their right to vote in local elections after 2018. It was important for community cohesion that the right of EU citizens to vote in local elections was upheld.
- The Gateway service and Community Connect were vital Council schemes in protecting Croydon's most vulnerable residents from the worst effects of the changes to social welfare.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to Cabinet:

1. That Croydon Council should campaign to protect the rights of all its citizens, including the right of EU citizens to vote and participate in local elections.

A6

Safer Croydon Community Safety Strategy 2017-2020

Officers in attendance:

- Councillor Hamida Ali, Cabinet Member
- Andy Opie, Director of Safety
- Jeff Boothe, Croydon Borough Commander, Metropolitan Police

The Cabinet Member introduced the item with the attached presentation. It was stated that the Mayor of London's new draft police and crime plan represented a policy shift to focus on crime with a serious harm impact such as violence against girls and violence with weapons. Measuring the performance of this plan was important as some of these crime areas were complex to measure. An example was domestic violence, a crime that historically had a low level of reporting of incidents; measuring an increase in reporting rates could be measured as a success to the extent that it evidenced increased confidence of victims to come forward.

Consultation with the public was undertaken to understand what the key priorities to residents were. Many of the identified priorities from

the consultation were reflected in the strategic assessment priorities. It was noted that in some areas with a reported downward trend in crime rates, some residents did not perceive the improvements to their area.

The Mayor of London's priority to focus on the victims of crime is similar to the proposed Croydon strategy, which had a priority focus on victims in areas such as hate crime. The proposed timeline for the strategy was to be submitted to Cabinet in time to be recommended for final approval at the Council meeting in June.

The new borough commander for Croydon Mr Jeff Boothe spoke to the Committee. It was stated that the Police's key priorities for Croydon were domestic abuse, child exploitation and abuse, and serious youth violence. There had been a number of multi-agency meetings to look at tackling serious youth violence and was no longer being viewed as purely a police matter. The Youth Offending service were commended for their community engagement work targeted at young people at risk of joining gangs.

It was reported that one challenge when dealing with knife crime was a lack of engagement by victims. There had been a knife attack a week prior to the Committee meeting, at the time of the meeting the victim was refusing to name the offender to the police or even his own family. It was stated that there was a need to work with community leaders and parents to identify the underlying causes of the non-cooperation. The message for young people needed to be that carrying knives for one's own protection actually made the person more vulnerable to knife violence. Croydon had benefited from central Metropolitan Police assets working in the borough such as officers from Trident. The work undertaken was producing results; an example was given of a recent knife stash that had been uncovered and the weaponry confiscated. Mr Boothe stated that the key issue when dealing with serious youth crime was to focus on the matter as a multiagency responsibility and not solely a policing matter.

In response to questions from the Committee, the following was stated:

- It was a statutory requirement to produce a community safety strategy and it would be made publicly available. A bulletin was emailed to residents signed up to the Council's My Account service which provided updates on community safety initiatives. It was stated that the idea of producing a concise version of the strategy for public consumption was interesting and would be looked into.
- Further information would be provided over the gender split of

offenders that was referenced to on page 33 of the report.

Statistics and Data

- For statistics related to crime rates, Croydon sat nearer the higher end of the scale compared to other London boroughs however this was due to the significantly higher population level.
- It was accepted that there were limits to the data procured through the survey conducted for the strategy. More thorough surveys would require significantly more funding. However, a broad range of data sources were used to inform the strategy such as surveys from the Metropolitan police.

Youth Crime

- Mr Boothe stated that organisations such as the Council's Youth Forum would help with engagement with young people to identify the reasons behind the increase in young people carrying knives for self-defence.
- Mr Boothe stated that young people congregating in the town centre was not an issue unique to Croydon. The issue was not the gathering of young people there, but ensuring that it was a safe environment for everyone.

Road Safety

- With regard to road safety issues, it was stated that prevention was important with measures such as 20mph zones and education in schools, to create behavioural change and not simply rely on punishment as a deterrent. Ward Panels were also an opportunity for residents to raise concerns with particular safety issues on certain roads.
- Mr Boothe directed the Committee to the Mayor of London's "Safe Streets for London" which was a strategic road safety action plan for the city. There were a number of ways to tackle road safety; education to affect behavioural change, road engineering such as speed humps to physically obstruct unsafe driving, and police operations where consistent breaches of safety were being committed.

PSPOs

- The Committee's concerns over the potential use of PSPOs was recognised however it was stated that the new powers were designed to be a flexible tool that could be crafted appropriately to respond to bespoke challenges that local authorities may face. This flexibility allowed for Councils to use the orders more creatively and take a targeted approach.
- The new powers replaced powers provided by historic legislation such as non-drinking zones and dog control orders. Some of these old orders, such as dispersal zones, had been in place in Croydon for a long time, and primarily used for the

night time economy. The new PSPOs gave local authorities the power to issue fines to enforce orders.

- Mr Boothe stated that PSPOs allowed for police officers to lawfully disperse people committing anti-social disorder but officers had discretion over whether such an order was necessary and appropriate for a given situation.
- An important feature of PSPOs was the ability of the Council to monitor its use effectively.

The Committee came to the following **CONCLUSIONS**:

- The Mayor of London's new policy focus for policing was welcomed by the Committee.
- The Community Safety Strategy should not contain too many priorities but establish some key overriding principles.
- The Committee were concerned with the survey conducted for the strategy, which by design was self-selecting for respondents. It was accepted that financial constraints were a considerable barrier to conducting a more extensive poll, but the Committee concluded that the strategy should place little weight on the outcome of the survey due to the unrepresentative nature of the data.
- Overall the strategy was a good policy document.
- The Committee was concerned by the new Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) and how they would be implemented in the future. The use of such orders must be for a clearly defined problem and there should be a robust review mechanism in place to monitor their use to prevent misuse.
- The Committee noted that the space given to road safety in the strategy was very small considering the number of people killed and injured on Croydon's roads.

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend to the Cabinet Member:

1. That more contextual information be provided in the strategy that posits Croydon within the broader picture of crime rates in neighbouring boroughs and across London.

2. That road safety should be more thoroughly addressed within the strategy as a community safety issue:

2.1 The section should cover crimes associated with illegal use of mobile phones, distracted and inattentive driving, drink and drugged driving, and excessive speeding.

2.2 The strategy should take up the suggestion of the Borough Commander that support on this should come from the relevant Met Police specialist traffic team.

A7 Scrutiny Work Programme

Councillor Fitzsimons highlighted to the Committee the proposed work programme for the April meeting, which included an item on how the Council scrutinises contractors on large scale tenders for Council services. The Committee would also include an item on considering the review of the Policing and Licensing of the Night Time Economy If the report was prepared in time.

With these additions, the Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the work programme for the year 2016/17.

A8 [The following motion is to be moved and seconded as the “camera resolution” where it is proposed to move into part B of a meeting]

MINUTES - PART B

None

The meeting ended at 9.26pm