Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 30 April 2019 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair),Councillor Robert Ward (Vice-Chair), Sherwan Chowdhury, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Joy Prince and Andy Stranack

Also Present: Councillor Leila Ben-Hassan (part), Simon Hall, Jason Perry (part), Scott Roche (part), Manju Shahul-Hameed

PART A

22/19 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

23/19 Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Andy Stranack declared a non-pecuniary interest in the 'Proposed Scoped of the new Digital Strategy' item as a family member was a director of a fibre broadband company.

24/19 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

25/19 Question Time: Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs, Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed was in attendance at the meeting to provide an update for the Committee on her Portfolio. During the introductory presentation given by Councillor Shahul-Hameed the following points were noted:-

- Strengths within the Portfolio included a 5.46% rise in the number of businesses in the borough since 2015 with a current total of 14,675 businesses.

- There was an enthusiastic business support network within the borough, who had organised the Croydon Means Business campaign.

- There was an Economic Summit held in Box Park 2018, with a second summit due to be held in the Fairfield Halls later this year.

- The borough had been hailed as a centre for enterprise and innovation by the Deputy Mayor for Business.

- The Croydon Digital Public Sector Contract event had been arranged to help businesses sell to the public sector.

- There had been the Croydon Works Health & Social Care recruitment event, which was attended by over 100 residents and resulted in employment for some of the attendees.

- Potential weaknesses included the weekly pay rates rising in Croydon at a slower rate than the rest of London.

- Some of the large scale developments planned for the borough were taking longer to progress than originally anticipated due to the continuing uncertainty over Brexit.

- Potential opportunities included the Creative Campus, which was being developed through a partnership between Croydon Council and Southbank University. This would help local children to access further education within the borough.

- The development of the Metropolitan Centre would lead to improved business opportunities.

- The Gatwick Expansion and the Brighton Mainline development would improve the rail links within the borough.

- Potential threats included the changing structure of retail and the continuing uncertainty over Brexit.

Following the presentation, the Committee were given the opportunity to question the Cabinet Member on her Portfolio. The first question related to the current position of both the Westfield redevelopment and the various housing developments being delivered by Brick by Brick. It was confirmed that the new owners of Westfield, Unibail-Rodamco, had given a strong commitment to Croydon when they had met with the Leader and other Council representatives. The Mayor of London had also met with representatives from Westfield to push for the start of the development. Recently it had been confirmed that the redevelopment would begin in 2020. In the meantime, the Cabinet Member was working closely with the Croydon Bid on a number of projects to retain the vitality of the town centre, including the Christmas Market.

As reassurance was given to the Committee that the Westfield project was still progressing, it was suggested that further consideration needed to be given to increasing communication about the project to provide reassurance to the wider public.

Brick by Brick continued to develop a variety of housing projects, a number of which would complete this year. There was also a need to work with local landowners to provide new employment land within the borough. To encourage this, the possibility of including a policy on affordable workspaces within the new Local Plan was being investigated.

431 people had been supported on the Better Working Futures programme, to date 72 had entered and been sustained in work. It was advised that the initiative was funded by money given by the Department of Work and Pensions to the Council to work with people unemployed for more than two years and those with complex heath conditions and disabilities. People were coming forward to participate in the scheme, but it could be a lengthy process to help people who had been long term unemployed and had complex health and disability issues back into work.

As a follow up, it was questioned whether the long term progress of those who had completed the scheme and been helped into work was monitored. It was confirmed that this information was tracked and to date 60% of the participants who had found employment continued to be employed after six months.

In light of the lack of growth in wages in the borough, compared to the rest of London and the activities of the Mayor of London seemingly focused on the central London business area, it was questioned whether there was a strategy to grow the town centre and attract and retain bigger employers. In response it was highlighted that 99.7% of the businesses in the borough were small or medium sized enterprises (SME's) employing less than 250 employees. The Council did have a scheme that encouraged larger businesses to work with small businesses to provide support. The Council also promoted the Good Employer Charter.

The changes made to planning policy by the Conservative Government allowing the redevelopment of office space to provide residential units had impacted upon the availability of employment space in the borough. As mentioned above, there was an aspiration through the Local Plan to bring back affordable employment space. Recently there had been four delegations from China to the borough which demonstrated that the Council was actively promoting Croydon on an international level.

Croydon's membership of the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership would be coming to an end, but the Council would continue to be a member of the London Economic Action Partnership (LEAP) and was working with local businesses to gain representation on its Board.

The Committee agreed that it would be useful to invite the Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs to a meeting in 2019-20 to focus specifically on the Economic Strategy for the borough, as Members remained unconvinced that there was enough of a focus on the wider strategy for the borough.

In response to a request for further details on the 39 children with special educational needs (SEN) who had been helped into either further education, work or placement through working with the Transitions Officer, it was agreed that this information would be provided after the meeting.

It was questioned whether there was a specific senior officer within the Council who had the specialist skills needed to address the needs of the Disabled Workforce. It was confirmed that such an officer was employed

within the Gateway directorate and the role also included a focus on the homeless workforce.

As a follow up, it was questioned whether there was any sign of success in helping employers to make reasonable adjustments for the disabled workforce. It was confirmed that one of the principles of the Good Employer Charter was equalities and diversity. Feedback from businesses had indicated that they had a lack of resources to support people with disabilities or the homeless. As a result the Champions Scheme for businesses had been introduced to encourage larger business to work with smaller businesses on specific areas such as equalities and diversity,

In response to a question about the support provided by the Council for SME's it was confirmed that monthly surgeries were organised for small businesses along with 200 other local business events. The Council continued to promote its Business Rate Relief Fund, which had awarded almost £1m to create new or safeguard existing jobs. There was also the Croydon Enterprise Fund scheme promoted by the Council that had provided almost £400,000 of loans to local businesses.

In response to a question about how success was measured within the Portfolio, it was advised that the number of businesses supported and as a result the number of jobs protected and sustained could be taken as a sign of success. It was highlighted that as part of the Business Rate Relief Fund application process, companies had to confirm their employee numbers and how many jobs would be protected through a successful application.

It was agreed that data on the performance of the TMRW Hub, including its occupancy rates would be provided to the Committee after the meeting.

As the report highlighted that there were a number of planning conditions focussed towards improving the local economy, it was questioned whether the delivery of these conditions was monitored. It was confirmed that Officers do monitor the conditions to ensure developers remained on track to deliver on their commitments.

It was confirmed that the tender process for contracts awarded by the Council valued between £10,000 and £100,000 was being refreshed, with a report due to be considered by the Cabinet in the near future. This would include a requirement for at least three tender submissions to be sought including two local bids.

As it was previously noted that four delegations from China had visited the borough, it was questioned whether other countries had also been targeted. It was confirmed that there had also been interest from India, with the Council open to interest from other countries.

It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Committee on the applications made to the High Street Fund following the meeting.

Concern was raised about the possible impact from parking charges on businesses with the borough centres. In response it was highlighted that at a recent High Street Conference only one attendee had raised parking as an issue and recently one hour free parking had been introduced in car parks in the borough centres. Additionally Save the High Street had recently carried out a survey which had shown that parking was not one of the top ten issues for high street businesses. Information on the attendees of the High Street Conference was requested.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member on behalf of the Committee for her attendance at the meeting.

Information Requests: Following the discussion of this item the Committee requested the following information to be provided after the meeting:-

1. Further information on the businesses that attended the High Street Conference event.

2. Further information on the award of the High Street Fund.

3. Performance information, including occupancy rates of the TMRW Hub.

4. A further breakdown of the 39 Special Educational Needs Children to confirm the numbers helped into further education, employment or work placements through working with the Transitions Officer.

Conclusions: Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. The wide range of events and activities being organised within the Economy & Jobs Portfolio was to be welcomed.

2. There was significant concern that despite a wide range of events and activities being organised, there seemed to be little data to allow an assessment to be made on whether the outcomes from this work was having a positive impact on the wider economy within the borough.

3. The Committee was concerned about the decline of Croydon as a major centre of employment compared to other parts of London and the South East over the last 20 years, and remained unconvinced that there was a wider strategy to reverse this decline.

4. The Committee agreed to add to its work programme for 2019/20 an item to focus specifically on the higher level, strategic themes relating to the creation of employment opportunities, the attractiveness of Croydon as a place for businesses to locate to, and the promotion of the economy in Croydon.

Recommendation: The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to recommend that the Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs be invited to a meeting of the Committee in 2019/20 to discuss the strategic approach to job

creation, business attraction, and the promotion of the economy in the borough as a place to do business in.

26/19   **Proposed Scope of the new Digital Strategy**

The Committee received a report setting out the proposed scope for the new Digital Strategy. In attendance at the meeting for this were:

- Councillor Simon Hall - Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources

- Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed - Cabinet Member for Economy and Jobs

- Neil Williams - Chief Digital Officer

- Dave Briggs – Head of Digital Operations

- Opama Khan – Head of Digital Place

During the introductory presentation on this item the following was noted:-

- The majority of the responsibility for the Digital Strategy fell within the Finance and Resources Portfolio, but the areas concerning the wider borough including the Smart Cities work streams came under the Economy and Jobs Portfolio.

- It was noted that the Government had produced a new code of practice for all local authority digital services. The Council's most recent IT Strategy had expired in 2014 and did not focus on the wider digital remit proposed for inclusion within the new Strategy.

- It was confirmed that the Strategy would be structured around three main themes – Digital Council, Digital Services and Digital Borough.

- Within the Digital Council theme, it was highlighted that there was already a good range of hardware and software in the Council, although there were issues around the wi-fi in the Town Hall to resolve. At present the service was in the process of transitioning away from Capita to a system using multiple vendors who were experts in their respective fields.

- Going forward, there would be some learning and development required to upskill staff on the use of software and a need to embed a digital culture within the wider Council.

- A potential threat to the Digital Council theme was the limited market for business specific software, but the Council was due to join the London Digital Declaration with other local authorities, which would increase the ability to influence software providers.

- Within the Digital Services theme, evidence indicated that was a high volume of people accessing Council services online. However, a significant amount of work was needed to improve the quality of the user experience, with only 30% of enquiries resolved through online services.

- Through improving the online service for customers there was potential to make savings and also allow the Council to focus its resources towards those with more complex needs who were not able to access self-serve.

- Potential threats to the delivery of the Digital Services theme included there being no sustained funding in place for its ongoing delivery and also the need to overcome public distrust due to how the service operated in the past.

- For the Digital Borough theme, the strengths included decent broadband coverage within the borough and the Croydon Tech City legacy.

- Weaknesses included the lack of coverage for fibre broadband, which was a priority to address and that the Tech City had been disbanded due to stagnation.

- Opportunities included the existing support to promote Croydon as a tech destination and the scope in Croydon to participate in Smart City trials.

- Potential threats included the continued doubt over the Westfield project and Brexit hampering ambitions. There was also the need to work with providers to deliver fibre broadband.

- Since the Chief Digital Officer, Neil Williams, had been appointed in October 2018, the Council had signed the Local Digital Declaration which gave a commitment to a set of declarations including the Digital Service Standards.

- The Service had been renamed as the Croydon Digital Service (CDS), which included the merging of a number of former separate areas and programmes. The focus was now on developing the team after its restructure away from a traditional IT team to one that met the Digital Service Standards. Services such as software support and web development were in the process of being brought back in-house. Work had also commenced on the web site redesign and rebuild.

- As part of the process of drafting the Strategy, input was being taken from a variety of sources. It was not envisioned that the final Strategy would be a lengthy document. Instead it would focus on the Council's current status regarding digital, where it wanted to be and how it would get there. The Strategy would be supported by public road maps that

confirmed in more detail what the Council was doing. This would enable the Service to be held to account.

Following the presentation, the Committee were given the opportunity to ask questions about the Digital Strategy. The first question concerned the possible resistance from staff across the Council to the proposed changes and how these would be overcome. It was acknowledged that this would be a significant challenge for the team to overcome. The shift from an IT team to a Digital Service focussed upon user needs would be key to the process, as it would allow CDS to have open conversations with teams on what they were trying to achieve. This would allow CDS to gain the trust of staff that they were delivering the best solutions even if this involved changing processes and practices. At present, there seemed to be a willingness across the Council to welcome the introduction of the new Digital Service.

It was highlighted that data sharing seemed to be a big issue for the organisation, which took a long time to do, particularly when sharing with external partners. It was agreed that there was a need for the Council to be able to quickly move data around in a way that kept the data safe. To achieve this there would be a need to look at innovative solutions, such as building new technology to fit on top of existing systems used by the Council and its partners to enable data sharing.

It was confirmed that at present some of the software used across the Council was operating under separate contracts, but where possible these would be brought under the remit of CDS.

To widen the input into the Digital Strategy, the team had been having consultation stands in local shopping centres and would be looking to carry out more public consultation going forward.

As there had been a number of different IT strategies produced by the Council in the past that had met with varying degrees of success, it was questioned how the Digital Strategy would be different. In response it was highlighted that the world was totally different to when the previous strategies had been produced, with digital ways of working embedded in everyday life. The Corporate Plan also set out how the Council would interface with the public, including locality based working which would be facilitated by digital systems.

It was questioned whether there was leadership support for the new strategy and whether there should be shared ownership. It was confirmed that leadership development was part of the work undertaken as part of the Strategy to deliver a shared understanding.

The decision to keep the Digital Strategy concise was welcomed, but it was suggested that there should be more information included about the Council's strategy to assist those residents unable to access the Council digitally. It was confirmed that digital inclusion would form part of the strategy. Assisted digital was a separate stream and was about the duty of care to ensure that anyone was able to access Council service regardless of ability.

As the strategy would place digital ways of working at the centre of the Council, it was questioned whether there was sufficient ongoing budget allocated to achieve its aims. It was confirmed that significant transformation resources had been allocated, as well as significant amounts in the capital programme. Looking forward to 2020-21 it would be necessary to put in a growth bid for the core budget. It was likely that the budget could be balanced through savings achieved in other services from adopting new digital processes.

It was agreed that open data should be referenced in the Digital Strategy. Data was a theme cross cutting across the strategy and the need to publish open data would form part of this.

It was noted that the responsibility for social media content sat within the Communications team. It was agreed that further work was needed to enhance the Council's social media presence and the Digital Service would need to work with Communications to ensure the benefits that could be derived from these platforms were maximised. The Committee agreed to include this as a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources.

It was suggested that the Digital Strategy should also make reference to the Library Service, as the use of technology would become increasingly important for the future delivery of this service. In response it was highlighted that a Library Strategy was due to be considered by the next meeting of the Cabinet and included proposals to transform the purpose of libraries. This would include reconsidering opening hours and other proposals to reinvent the libraries as community assets such as agile delivery and meeting user needs, which would need the support of CDS to deliver.

It was highlighted that the report did not indicate that the Smart City project would be included within the Digital Strategy, which was questioned. In response it was advised that it was important to base any Smart City projects around the actual needs of residents, such as providing support for people suffering from dementia. The final Strategy would include an update on the current thinking on Smart Cities.

It was confirmed that the Digital Strategy was due to be considered by the Cabinet in July 2019. Much of the detail would be outlined in the aforementioned public road maps, with a prototype for this being developed.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and the officers for their attendance at the meeting and extended an invite for them to return to the Committee in twelve months to provide an update on progress made with implementing the Digital Strategy.

Conclusions: Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:

1. The Committee welcomed the enthusiasm of the representatives from the Croydon Digital Service team and felt that their engagement with the questions of the Committee was to be commended.

2. The Committee were reassured that there was a genuine vision for the Digital Strategy.

3. Although the Committee were reassured about the vision for the Digital Strategy, concern remained as to whether the wider culture of the organisation would hinder its delivery, as history has shown that previous improvements was slow to be delivered or were never achieved. As such it was concluded that it would be important to review the progress of embedding the Digital Strategy within the Council in twelve months.

4. The Committee had concerns about the Council's current presence on social media and the usability of the council's website, and agreed that the Digital Strategy should directly address the need for Croydon Digital Service to work with the Communications team to improve the performance in this area.

5. The Committee was keen to know how this strategy would incorporate the council's commitments to openness and transparency, in particular its commitment to promotion of open data, and accessibility of information for both businesses and residents.

Recommendation: The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to recommend the following to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources:-

1. That the Digital Strategy should specifically reference how the Council's social media presence, including its website, will be improved.

2. To ensure that improvements are delivered the strategy needs to be supported by a work plan that has measurable outcomes, where progress against targets can be assessed and monitored by the public and Councillors.

3. The concepts of transparency and open data needs to be embedded within the new strategy, and the strategy needs to include how it will assess improvement of these concepts over time

4. That the progress made on the Digital Strategy be reviewed by the Committee in twelve months.

27/19   **Annual Report from the Chairman of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee**

The Chair of the Children and Young People Sub-Committee, Councillor Robert Ward, provided a report for the Committee, which was set out in the supplementary agenda. This report provided an overview of the work of the Sub-Committee in the past year, scrutinising the progress made on the

Children's Improvement Plan. During the introduction of the report by the Chair of the Children and Young People Sub-Committee the following points were noted:-

- The principle used as a basis for the work of the Sub-Committee was that they needed to address the key areas highlighted by Ofsted. However this needed to be balanced against the need not to create unnecessary duplication of work already going on elsewhere.

- It was recognised that there had possibly been too much flexibility in the work programme of the Sub-Committee, which would be addressed in the forthcoming year with more structure put in place.

- The Sub-Committee had recently received a complete set of indicators from the Children's Improvement Board, which would allow them to focus on those not going as well as others.

- For the next meeting of the Sub-Committee in June, the agenda would include a reports on the recovery plan for high needs, the localities model and the Children's Improvement Board as well as looking at preparations for the next Ofsted inspection expected later in the year.

- It was hoped that there would be further opportunities for the Sub-Committee to engage with a wide variety of people including service users. It was also noted that there may need to be more work needed outside of the formal Sub-Committee meetings to enable this engagement.

The Committee acknowledged the importance of the report from the Chair of the Sub-Committee, in particular should the outcome from the next Ofsted inspection result in the service continuing to be rated as inadequate.

It was questioned whether the Sub-Committee was receiving the responses it needed to be able to make an assessment of the Children's Improvement Plan. It was advised that it could be difficult as the organisation was sometimes reluctant to be challenged. It was not the Sub-Committee's job to either judge or manage the Service, but instead to ask questions and look for potential gaps.

It was noted that one of the key area's for improvement was recruitment and retention. Reports seemed to indicate that the performance was improving in the area, but anecdotal evidence from other sources seemed to contradict this. It was questioned whether recruitment and retention should be bracketed together as there would be different reasons effecting each. The Chair of the Sub-Committee advised from their work over the past year, it seemed that retention of staff remained a significant issue and they had concerns about the continuity of social workers supporting children.

The Committee agreed to extend its thanks to the Sub-Committee for its work over the past year, with the work of the Chair noted as being exemplary. It

was agreed that another report should be given in the run up to the next Ofsted inspection to apprise the Committee of the progress made.

Conclusions: Following the discussion of this item, the Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. That the content of the report should be noted and the Committee's thanks should be given to the Chair and the Sub-Committee for their hard work over the past year.

2. That the Children & Young People Sub-Committee should continue to lead on the scrutiny of the Children's Improvement Plan.

3. That another report be request from the Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee in the run up to the Ofsted inspection to apprise the Committee of the progress made.

28/19 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not needed.

The meeting ended at 10.20 pm

Signed:
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Date:
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