

Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 14 January 2020 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),
Leila Ben-Hassel, Jeet Bains, Jerry Fitzpatrick and Joy Prince
Also Present: Councillor Tony Newman

PART A

1/20 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2019 were agreed as an accurate record, subject to an amendment changing the following sentence from:-

‘Given the scale of the project the Committee agreed that there should be a specific risk register for the Growth Zone project itself rather than the risks being considered as part of a wider Corporate Risk Register.’

To read as follows:-

‘Given the scale of the project the Committee agreed that there should be a specific risk register for the Growth Zone project itself as well as than the risks being considered as part of a wider Corporate Risk Register.’

2/20 Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

3/20 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

4/20 Strategy Forward Plan

The Committee considered a report providing an overview of the Strategy Forward Plan, which had been created to manage the Council’s strategies and plans. The Chair of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee welcomed the report, noting that it would help to provide greater transparency over the Council’s strategies and also help with planning future Scrutiny items.

During the discussion of the report there were a number of questions raised by the Committee, with the first relating to the Council’s adoption of the Public Health Approach to Violence Reduction and where this sat. It was confirmed that the Public Health Approach required a wide ranging response and would be picked up and embedded in strategies across the Council.

It was confirmed that the review of the Autism Strategy would be led by the Health and Wellbeing Service supported by the Policy Team and as with any Council strategy would include engagement with stakeholders, which in the case of the Autism Strategy would include the Autism Partnership Board. It was also confirmed that although development of the Strategy would be led by the Health and Wellbeing Service, similarly to the Public Health Approach, it would require a wide ranging response to be embedded across the Council.

It was confirmed that the Policy Team was working with the Digital team to ensure that all Council Strategies were included on the website in an easy to find location.

In response to a question about whether there was a template for creating a good strategy, it was confirmed that would be guidance provided, but given the wide variety of strategies held by the Council it was important not to take an overly prescriptive approach.

It was questioned whether there was a process in place for capturing any lessons learned from across the Council during the production of strategies. It was confirmed that there was not a formal process, but in having the forward plan it would provide clarity on who was leading on strategies and help to facilitate discussions on best practice. It was also anticipated that any approach to reviewing a strategy would involve looking at other authorities to find out who were the market leaders in terms of individual strategies and learning from their approach.

It was noted that as part of the process for creating the Strategy Forward Plan there had been an audit of all existing Council strategies that had led to it being discovered that some strategies were either no longer applicable or had been superseded. It was agreed that the full list of strategies including confirmation of the reason why particular strategies were no longer required would be provided for the Committee's information.

A request was also made for the Committee to be provided with an expanded version of the Strategy Forward Plan (as set out in Appendix 1 of the report), in a matrix format to include information such as the strategy owner, lead and relevant Cabinet Members, the department, any interdependencies with other strategies and the timetable and reason for review.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the officers for their work in preparing the Strategy Forward Plan and noted that there were a number of strategies reviews in the pipeline that may be of interest to Scrutiny.

Information Request

Arising from the discussion of this item, the Committee would like to request that they be provided with the following information:-

1. The full list of the strategies considered as part of the audit of the Council's strategies, including confirmation of the reasons why it was decided that particular strategies were no longer required.

2. That an updated Strategy Forward Plan be provided to include information such as the strategy owner, lead and relevant Cabinet members, the department, any interdependencies with other strategies and both the timetable and reason for review.

Conclusions

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

1. The creation of the Strategy Forward Plan and the approach of formally reviewing strategies regularly was welcomed.
2. It was agreed that the value of the Strategy Forward Plan would increase if it ensured that the Scrutiny Chairs were kept informed of when strategies were due to be reviewed and as such could be timetabled into the Scrutiny Work Programme accordingly.
3. The Committee welcomed the confirmation that Member Champions would be alerted to and involved in any future strategy reviews that fell within their remit.
4. It was agreed that there would be considerable value in a training session being arranged for Members on the Council's approach to creating a strategy and as such a request would be made to the Members' Learning and Development Panel for this to be included in the Members training programme.

5/20

Question Time: Leader of the Council

The Committee considered a report from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Tony Newman, along with a presentation delivered at the meeting. The presentation can be viewed on the link below:-

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s20139/Leaders%20Presentation%20for%20Scrutiny%20-%202014%20January%202019.pdf>

Following the presentation the Committee was given the opportunity to question the Leader of the Council. The first question related to possible areas of weakness for the Council, with it noted that although Children's Services continued to improve it had started its improvement journey from a difficult place. Another challenging area was the work of the Violence Reduction Network, which had improved the working relationships between the partners, but required ongoing work over the long term to tackle both the underlying causes of crime and the perception of crime in the borough.

As there were significant challenges facing the retail sector it was questioned what the Council could do to support businesses in the borough. It was advised that support was provided by the Council through its work to ensure that streets were clean and safe. It was also about ensuring that local high streets remained an attractive place to visit, which could be evidenced through the recent investment in Thornton Heath High Street. However many

of the challenges were related to other factors such as the wider economy and the changing retail landscape and as such were beyond the control of the Council.

In response to a request for an update on the Westfield redevelopment of the town centre, it was confirmed that the Leader and other representatives from the Council had met with the developer in November, with a further meeting scheduled for February. From the meeting in November, it was evident that there was likely to be a significantly changed scheme coming forward to reflect the reduced requirement for retail space. In having the opportunity to rethink the scheme in light of the challenging retail environment it may work to the long term benefit of Croydon.

As it was noted that support had been given to the possible expansion of Gatwick Airport, it was questioned how this could be managed against other potentially conflicting policies such as those directed towards tackling climate change. In response it was advised that it was important to use the Council's influence on central Government on climate change. Any possible expansion of Gatwick Airport would have an economic benefit for Croydon with it important to attract new jobs to the borough including those in green industries.

It was acknowledged that further work was needed on the provision of high quality office accommodation in the town centre, with it highlighted that the Council's sustainability work was not just related to climate change, but also other areas such as the provision of affordable housing and jobs. The forthcoming provision of a university offer in Croydon would be fundamental in attracting new jobs and sectors to invest in the borough.

In response to a question about what action was being taken to reduce the risk of flooding in the borough, it was advised that the issue of flooding needed careful consideration. As such it would be included for discussion by, the soon to be launched, Citizen Panels which would be focussed on a range of climate change and sustainability issues. As part of this work the Council was also planning to engage expert advice on issues such as flooding and air quality.

The Capital investment in projects such as Fairfield Halls and the New Addington Sports Centre was welcomed, however concern was raised about both the cost and schedule control on these project, with it questioned how such issues could be minimised on future projects. It was highlighted that in large projects such as the Fairfield Halls there was always the possibility that there would be increased costs that could not be foreseen and as such it there may be a need to be more open about potential costs and possible unknowns in advance of a project starting.

It was highlighted that it had previously been promised that 200 car parking spaces would be available for the opening of the Fairfield Halls, but as of yet these were not available. It was agreed that this would be investigated and a response provided for the Committee.

It was questioned how it would be possible for performance of Brick by Brick to be judged and whether performance would be reviewed on individual projects. It was confirmed that the most obvious indicators would be the number of homes being delivered and the return provided through the dividend. There would be transparency on the cost of individual projects within the restrictions of commercial confidentiality.

In response to a question about the potential in year overspend in the Council's budget for 2019-20 it was confirmed that this was being managed and would be made up by the end of the year. It was also confirmed that it was planned to put money into reserves from 2020-21.

As Croydon's population was expected to continue to grow in the coming years, it was questioned whether there was sufficient revenue and capital resource available to meet the growing demand for services. It was advised that it presented a significant challenge for the Council, although an increased population would also mean an increased Council Tax base in the borough. It was hoped with a new Government in place it would mean that there would be greater financial certainty which would help local authorities to plan for the longer term. Business rates was another area of uncertainty with clarity also needed on its future allocation.

It was suggested that Croydon had not always been as successful as its peers in making its case to Government for funding and as such it was questioned what steps could be taken to change this moving forward. It was highlighted that projects such as the Growth Zone were helping to deliver funding for the borough, but there was always more to be done, with the Administration happy to work with anyone on funding for Croydon.

It was highlighted that the One Croydon Alliance had started to change how health and social care services were provided with an emphasis on partnership working. Further down the line it was likely that this could lead to a change in how public services were funded, including future capital investment in health services.

A Member of the Committee questioned why Brexit was listed as potential challenge, when it could also be seen as a potential opportunity. It was advised that it had been listed as a challenge following feedback from the local business community who disliked the uncertainty over the type of deal that would be delivered by the Government. It also needed to be acknowledged that Brexit was leading to uncertainty for many of the EU citizens living in the borough. It was highlighted that an Economic Development Conference had been held recently at Fairfield Halls to bring together businesses in the borough, which demonstrated that the Council was being proactive in its approach to attracting new business to the borough.

It was confirmed that a wide range of data was monitored by the Administration to provide an understanding of how the borough was performing. This included information on the amount of new homes being provided, footfall in the town centre and unemployment levels.

The themes of the Digital Strategy, as outlined in the report, were welcomed, but it was questioned whether there were any 'quick wins' that could be introduced that would demonstrate to residents that improvements were being made. In response it was advised that the website was in the process of being improved, but at the present time it was still a work in progress. Looking to the future, it was likely that apps and the website would increasingly become the main entry point for residents interacting with the Council and as such it was important to ensure that the website was fit for purpose and able to perform to the level expected by residents.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Leader for his attendance at the meeting and his openness in answering the questions of the Committee.

Information Request

Arising from the discussion of this item, the Committee would like to request that they be provided with the following information:-

1. An update on the provision of 200 car parking spaces for Fairfield Halls.

Conclusions

Following discussion of this item the Committee concluded that it would be preferable if when planning future major projects to include potential cost ranges rather than providing a specific budget total, as had been the case with the Fairfield Halls redevelopment.

6/20 Scrutiny Work Programme 2019-20

The Committee considered a report setting out the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2019-20.

The Chair of the Committee confirmed that the meeting originally scheduled for 10 December 2019 had been rearranged for 10 February 2020. In preparation for this meeting, which would include a Question Time session with the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport, Councillor Oliver Lewis, an invite had been arranged for the members of the Committee to attend the opening of the New Addington Sports Centre on 16 January. There would also be a tour of Fairfield Halls at 4.30pm on the day of the meeting for Committee members.

The Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee highlighted that the work programme for the sub-committee was in the process of being re-prioritised and as a result there was likely to be changes made to the version set out in the report.

The Committee **resolved** to note the Scrutiny Work Programme 2019-20.

7/20 Exclusion of the Press and Public

This motion was not required.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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