

## Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Monday, 20 September 2021 at 6.30 pm.

This meeting was held remotely and is viewable on the Council's website.

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillors Sean Fitzsimons (Chair), Robert Ward (Vice-Chair), Leila Ben-Hassel (Deputy-Chair), Jade Appleton, Mike Bonello and Joy Prince.

**Also Present:** Councillor Hamida Ali, Mario Creatura, Stuart King and Callton Young OBE.  
Paul Ford (Coulsdon Community Centre Management Committee) and Charles King (Coulsdon Residents Association).

### PART A

76/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosure of interest made at the meeting.

77/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no urgent items of business for consideration by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee at this meeting.

78/21 **CALL-IN: Asset Disposal: Former CALAT Coulsdon, Malcolm Road and Barrie Close site (Coulsdon Community Centre)**

The Scrutiny & Overview Committee considered a call-in request of the key decision set out in the 'Asset Disposal: Former Calat Coulsdon, Malcolm Road and Barrie Close Site (Coulsdon Community Centre)' Cabinet report. The decision was taken by the Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance in consultation with the Leader of the Council on 31 August 2021.

The Chair of the Committee explained the process for considering a call-in, confirming that the Committee needed to agree whether to review the decision or not and if it was decided to proceed, to confirm how much time it wished to allocate for the discussion of the item. The Committee agreed that it would review the decision and allocated one and a half hours for its consideration.

The Chair went on to explain that there were three outcomes the Committee could reach as a result of its review. These were:-

1. That no further action was necessary and the decision could be implemented as originally intended.

1. To refer the decision back to the Cabinet for reconsideration, outlining the nature of the Committee's concerns
2. To refer the decision to Council, if the Committee considered that the decision taken was outside of the Budget and Policy Framework.

At the outset of the item the Committee lead on the call-in, The Chair, Councillor Sean Fitzsimons, outlined the grounds for its submission. It was highlighted that in February 2021, the Committee gave its support to the Interim Asset Disposal Strategy which listed the sites being considered for disposal. The strategy indicated that disposal of the former Calat Centre site was predicated on a replacement community centre being provided. There was concern that the Cabinet report on the disposal lacked sufficient information on the future plans for the two linked sites, to provide reassurance to the local community on the provision of a replacement community centre.

The process for asset disposal set out in the strategy made it clear that there was several steps that needed to be taken before any asset disposal was agreed and the Committee was keen to ensure that the process had been followed. Finally the call-in also sought to test whether it was in the Council's best interest to either retain or sell the asset.

Following the introduction, Stephen Wingrave, Head of Asset Management and Estates and Councillor Stuart King, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal were given the opportunity to explain the reasons for proceeding with the asset disposal. It was highlighted that the site proposal had been in use as a temporary car park while the Lime Green Road car park had been closed to the public. The income generated during that period was approximately £1,244 which demonstrated low usage.

An external valuation had been carried out of the site which had indicated that the proposal put forward to dispose of the asset was the best solution for the Council. The lack of business case in the Cabinet report to justify the decision was acknowledged and as a result the business case had been submitted as part of the report for this Call-in. It was confirmed that the right process had been followed with external valuation sought and legal sign off undertaken.

The site had not been marketed due to the specific opportunity to dispose of the site to a local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) as a local for a medical centre. As the CCG had identified another site in the area as an alternative location, there was a risk that this opportunity could be lost if disposal was delayed. Both the CCG and the Council agreed that this was the best site to provide the proposed medical centre.

The Committee was provided the opportunity to ask questions about the decision, with clarification sought on the site proposed for disposal. There was confusion about this as previous reports had indicated that this site along with the conjoined site on which the former Calat building was located, were linked. Officers confirmed that the former Calat site had been split with this decision relating to the southern part of the site where the car park was

located. The remainder of the site, which included the former Calat building would be considered by the Cabinet later in the year.

The Chair welcomed representatives from the local community to the meeting, who were attendance to provide the view of local residents. It was confirmed that there were no objections to the proposal for a medical centre being built on the site, but there was concern about whether the Council intended to fulfil its obligation to provide a community centre on the site. It was emphasised that it was essential for the local community that confirmation was given that a replacement Community Centre would be delivered on the site of the former Calat building, that a project to deliver housing for people with residents would be honoured and that the dialysis unit that had been proposed for several years would be delivered.

It was highlighted that the Community Centre had been a vital part of Coulsdon for many years, with almost full occupancy, hosting activities that which were essential to the residents. The proposed asset disposal had caused concern to many with questions raised about the future of the Community Centre. The core message was for the Council was the need for increased engagement with the local community, as many of the concerns raised could have been alleviated through engagement with ward members and resident associations.

In response to the representations from the community, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal advised that the second site which was linked to Barry Close and the Community Centre which was proposed as a dialysis unit was being assessed and proposals would be presented to Cabinet later in the year. Reassurance and a commitment was given that officers would engage with both Ward Councillors and community groups as part of the decision making process in order to take account of local need. When taking the decision, the Cabinet would consider what was in the best interest of the community and the aspirations of the local residents.

Officers added that the decision on the medical centre had no impact on the decision over the relocation of the Community Centre. There was still five years left on the lease for the Community Centre and there was no intention by the Council to terminate that lease early. The Council would also have an obligation to relocate the Community Centre to an alternative site.

The discussion of the Committee highlighted a number of inconsistencies in the terminology used in the different reports regarding this asset disposal which had caused confusion not just to Councillors but also to residents. Any future reports on asset disposals should have a thorough explanation of the grounds for disposal and how this would impact upon the local community. A communication plan was also needed to guide engagement with local communities on future asset disposals. Concern was raised that a thorough business case had not been included with the Cabinet report, which raised concern about the adherence to the process set out in the Interim Asset

Disposal Strategy. There would have been more confidence in the process had this been included alongside the asset disposal report.

At the conclusion of the questioning the Chair thanked both the Officers and Members in attendance for their engagement with the questions of the Committee.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee considered which of the three outcomes detailed about it wished to make on the call-in. It was agreed that although there had been concern about lack of information provided to support the original decision, the subsequent information provided as part of the call-in gave reassurance that the correct process, as set out in the Interim Asset Disposal Strategy, had been followed. Given that there was local support for the disposal of the site in question to a local CCG to host a medical centre, it was agreed that no further action was necessary and the original decision could proceed as intended.

The Committee **Resolved:**

That no further action was necessary and the decision can be implemented as originally intended.

However the Committee requested that the following conclusions and recommendations form part of the consultation process on the business case for the remainder of the site that was due to be presented to Cabinet later in the year.

**Conclusions:**

Following its consideration of the call-in request and the subsequent information gathering during questioning at the meeting, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reached the following conclusions

1. It was agreed that the proposed use of the site for a new Medical Centre was welcomed and would be extremely beneficial for the local residents.
2. The consultation process needed to be improved to ensure wider consultation beyond local Ward Councillors in order to manage the potential impact on local communities of future asset disposals.
3. In the interest of maintaining transparency, it was important that future reports on individual asset disposals provided enough information to clearly outline why it was in the best interest of the Council to dispose of the site, the business case to support this conclusion, an assessment of potential risks associated with each site, an assessment of the potential impact upon the local community and site maps marking the asset for disposal
4. The Committee welcomed the commitment by the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal to ensure there was wider consultation with ward

councillors and community organisations as part of the decision making process on future disposals.

**Recommendations:**

Having considered the information presented at the meeting, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed to submit the following recommendation for the consideration of the Cabinet:-

1. Given the potential public concern that can be raised by the disposal of Council assets, the Cabinet needs to ensure there is a robust plan for engagement with local communities for future asset disposals.
2. That Cabinet reports on future asset disposals needed to be far more comprehensive, setting out the business case for disposal and assessments of both the potential risks and the impact on the local community.

79/21 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not required.

80/21 **CALL-IN: Asset Disposal: Former CALAT Coulsdon, Malcolm Road and Barrie Close site (Coulsdon Community Centre)**

A Part B discussion was not required.

The meeting ended at 8.12 pm

**Signed:**

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**Date:**

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