

General Purposes & Audit Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 25 January 2022 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Dr Olu Olasode (Chair);

Councillors Nina Degrads, Paul Scott, Chris Clark, Joy Prince, Stuart Millson,
Clive Fraser, Ian Parker and Ola Kolade

Also

Present: Councillor Alisa Fleming, Councillor Karen Jewitt (Vice-Chair)

Apologies: Councillor Lynn Hale

PART A

1/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 4 March 2021 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

2/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

3/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

4/21 **Presentation on an area of Risk**

The Committee received a presentation regarding the Item related to the Whitgift Centre on the Councils Risk Register.

Malcom Davies, Head of Anti Fraud, Risk and Insurance introduced the presentation, which was led by Heather Cheesborough.

The following Items were raised by Members:

- a) Developer: Members raised the possibility of bringing in a new delivery partner. The Officer explained that the current partners were the owners of the land and would have to be in agreement of any such decision

b) Prospects for town centre: Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that Council recognised the Whitgift Centre needed a comprehensive regeneration. The original plans for a large shopping centre were now not seen as the best way forward for Croydon, which was hoping to reflect the positive attributes of the town itself

c) Timescale: Members raised concerns over the timescale of change in the event that a new Planning Application was submitted for the Whitgift Centre. The Officer noted that if this happened, it would be anticipated for a 12-18 month wait for redevelopment works to come forward due to the size of works required. However, the Officer also noted that there had been recent success in moving tenants into empty units on the North End of the site – if this priority continued in filling the empty buildings then there may not be any need for the submission of a new Planning Application.

The Committee noted the presentation and thanked Officers.

5/21

Review of the MTFs January Cabinet Report

Richard Ennis, Interim Corporate Director of Resources gave a verbal update to the Committee regarding the MTFs report which had been presented to Cabinet the preceding evening highlighting that:

- The reports had been presented to Cabinet the evening before the meeting of the Committee
- The 2021/22 forecast outturn had broadly been quite consistent and was on target to budget overall and a large amount of attention had been given to delivering the general fund revenue budget this year
- £10 million had been put into the budget to fill reserves in 21/22 and this is still planned to action
- It was more 'optimal' for the Council to fund its capitalisation with receipts instead of borrowing money. It was important to work on reducing costs and borrowing and improving the state of the Council's own finances. This would shine a positive light on the Council as well as avoiding the 1% capitalisation premium and the reduced term of 20 years minimum revenue period
- It was everyone's responsibility to play their part in the inflationary rises and not simply pass costs onto the Council and our tax payers
- Overall, it was positive that the Council had taken positive steps in the right direction getting its finances under control as well as the continued provision of resident services.
- The Council continues to work on the closure of 2 sets of accounts for 2020/21 and 2021/22, in particular for the significant issue of Croydon Affordable Homes and Croydon Affordable Tenures, and additionally cash reconciliations.

6/21

Revisions to Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

The Committee received a report including the draft Annual Governance Statement for review and approval.

Heather Wills, Governance Improvement Advisor introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) Consistency of report: A Member highlighted inconsistencies in relation to dates in the document. The Officer explained that the report had been developed and updated over time and updated. To aid ease of reading the Officer agreed to go review the report to ensure a consistent approach to the use of dates throughout
- b) Return to Committee: Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that the next logical point for the report to return to Committee would be the first meeting of the Committee in the 2022/2023 Municipal Year. This would enable the Committee to review whether any actions due for completion by the end of March had been achieved.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed to review and approve the revised draft Annual Governance Statement 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report subject to minor amendments to ensure consistency
2. Agreed to note the updated Code of Governance (Appendix 2 of the report)
3. Agreed to receive a progress report on implementation of the Annual Governance Statement action plan soon after the completion of the 2021/22 financial year.

7/21

Revisions to the Council's Constitution

At this point in the proceedings and in line with the Council's Constitution, the Vice-Chair Councillor Karen Jewitt took the Chair for the following General Purposes Items.

The Committee received a report updating Councillors on progress in reviewing the Council's Constitution in preparation for the introduction of the Mayoral model of governance and sought approval for other appropriate changes to the Constitution.

Heather Wills, Governance Improvement Advisor introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) Amendment to 2.1: Members asked that the presentation of information relating to Members and Wards be simplified. The Officer agreed to pick this comment up as part of the changes to bring forward in March
- b) Planning Matters: A Member asked about progress on changes drafted in respect to Planning matters in the Constitution some time ago and asked whether these could be looked in to. The Officer agreed to get an update on these matters.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

- 1. Approved the changes to the Constitution as detailed in Section 2 and set out more fully in Appendix 1 of the report.

8/21 **Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman Report**

The Committee received a report detailing the recommendations and actions from the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) that would be carried out by the responsible service manager in the Adults Social Care Team.

Simon Robson, Interim Director Adult Social Care introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) Training within the Council: Following a question from a Member, the Officer noted that the new Head of Service Team had brought in high standards and training had been extended to the wider Council including Housing colleagues.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved to:

- 1.1 Consider the Public Interest report dated 6 December 2021 and the recommendations made by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) in relation to Croydon Council. The full list of recommendations were in Section 6 of the report
- 1.2 Agree the recommendations set out in the Public Interest report; and
- 1.3 Note the steps, progress and time line to implement the recommendations set out in Section 7 of the report.

9/21 **Council Meeting Dates 2022/23**

The Committee received a report proposing dates for Full Council to facilitate early production of the Council diary and to enable future planning of Council business for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

Stephen Rowan, Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny introduced the report.

The following matters were raised by Members:

- a) Liaising with Committee Chairs: Following a question from a Member, the Officer explained that there had been informal consultation with Committee clerks in the run up to putting the report together, but it was important to get the Full Council dates set as priority. It was usual for Committee Chairs to change around at Annual Council so it would not be surprising for a few of these dates to move following the meeting
- b) Arrangements for incoming Mayor: Members raised concerns regarding the date of the incoming Mayor's appointment and the proposed date of Annual Council. The Officer explained that there were constraints on the date for the meeting, noting that it must be held by no later than the end of May. The Officer explained that there was a Mayoral Readiness Draft Plan of Key Events highlighting the preparation the successful Mayoral candidate would have to arrange, therefore this would not come as a shock.

Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

- 1.1 Agreed to approve, on behalf of the Council, the schedule of Full Council meeting dates for 2022/2023 as outlined in Option B of Appendix 2, the Full Council meeting dates as detailed in paragraph 3.11 of the report, which schedule the meetings on Wednesdays
- 1.2 Agreed to note the schedule of Cabinet meeting dates for 2023/23 as detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.12 of the report; and
- 1.3 Agreed to note the proposed schedule of remaining meeting dates for 2022/23 as detailed in both appendices to the report.

10/21 **Work Programme**

At this point in the proceedings, the role of Chair returned to the Independent Chair, Dr. Olu Olasode.

Stephen Rowan, Democratic Services and Scrutiny introduced the report, highlighting the following amendments:

- The Croydon Renewal Update on Recovery would be presented to the April Committee meeting
- The Report in Public Interest Action Plan would be led by the Corporate Director of Resources, Richard Ennis.

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Following consideration, it was resolved that the Committee:

1. Agreed the Work Programme 2021/22 with the amendments agreed as set out in the above Minute.

The meeting ended at 8.56 pm

Signed:

Date: