

# Public Document Pack

## Scrutiny Streets & Environment Sub-Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 14 March 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillors Councillor Ria Patel (Chair), Councillor Amy Foster (Vice-Chair), Simon Brew, Danielle Denton, Christopher Herman, Mohammed Islam and Luke Shortland

**Also Present:** Councillor Scott Roche (Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment)  
Councillor Jeet Bains (Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration)  
Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel (Virtual)

**Apologies:** None.

### PART A

#### 8/23 **Apologies for Absence**

There were none.

#### 9/23 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

#### 10/23 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

#### 11/23 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

#### 12/23 **Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Specification**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 17 to 28 of the agenda, which provided an update on the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Specification. The Director of Sustainable Communities introduced the item and went through the presentation at Appendix A.

The Chair highlighted the 'Options Appraisal' and asked whether any options had been disregarded at this stage. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the only option that had been discounted was that of extending the current contract past 2025; delivery of services by in-house provision, re-procurement or Local Authority Trading Company were still on the table for consideration. The Chair asked if there had been consideration of delivering different elements of the service through a mix of these options and the Sub-Committee heard that this was still a possibility.

The Chair asked if officers were confident that the Council was within the timeline for delivering the possible options that had been set out, noting the need to account for the Greater London Authority (GLA) Collection Conformity assessment. The Sub-Committee heard that the GLA only looked at the collection element of the service and that the current provision already met the requirements of the GLA. Members heard that the GLA submission had already been undertaken, and that approval could take up to 108 days, which sat within the proposed timeline for the final officer recommendation to Cabinet. On the procurement pack, Members heard that officers were running activity for all options in parallel, and it was acknowledged that the timelines were tight but achievable. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that, if it were decided to go out to the market, then conversations would be consolidated where possible. The aim was for any contract to be awarded by early 2024, if this was the option that was chosen, to ensure there were 12 months for a contractor to purchase vehicles and be ready to deliver services.

The Sub-Committee asked how it was possible to ensure that any Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the new contract would be achievable, and how these would compare to other similar boroughs. The Director for Sustainable Communities acknowledged that the KPIs in the current contract had been set at a level that was too ambitious when compared to neighbours. Members heard that benchmarking with other authorities would take place to inform the setting of KPIs for the new contract, as well as incorporating industry standards; realistic targets would be set, with ambitious stretch targets to incentivise good performance.

The Vice-Chair asked what outcomes were being sought as a part of the new contract, and whether these would be realistic given potential costs. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the report to the November 2022 Sub-Committee had included a breakdown of the indicative costs of the Options Appraisal, but that these would be sense checked for the final report to Cabinet; possible growth in this area had been highlighted in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Members heard that there was a desire to maintain the current frequency of collections, which conformed to the standards set out by the Mayor of London, and to improve collections for flats above shops.

The Chair asked what could be done differently for collections for flats above shops and heard that the Council could consider a number of different approaches, such as a bag service or communal food collection points. The

Director for Sustainable Communities explained that the specification would recognise the ambition to provide an improved service in this area, but that it would be for bidders, should the contract go to market, to explain how this would be achieved by looking at national best practise.

The Sub-Committee asked how it was ensured that lapsed Garden Waste collection subscriptions were not still collected. Members heard that there was a process in place for this that started with a notification to the resident, then to the contractor, and culminated in the removal of the Garden Waste bin. The Sub-Committee asked about missed Garden Waste collections, and the possibility of extending the service for the number of weeks the collection had been missed. The Head of Environment Services & Sustainable Neighbourhoods explained that it was not currently possible to automate this kind of process, as it required a manual investigation by an officer, and an officer decision on whether there would be an extension. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that any extension would be at the cost of the contractor, which was why due diligence was especially important. The Chair asked if officers were confident that all Garden Waste bins were being collected once contracts ended, and the Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the contractor was notified not to collect Garden Waste and to recover the bin. There were a number of reasons that bins might not be recovered, including theft and residents failing to present the bins for recovery.

Members asked what solutions would be considered for properties without the space to accommodate multiple wheelie bins. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that this was already in place through a box collection for certain streets and areas in the Borough; this requirement would likely be continued in any new contract to ensure bins were not left on the street. The Cabinet Member for Streets & Environment explained that the quality of the boxes themselves could be looked at to ensure these were durable, with lids that were secure and not easily lost.

The Chair invited Councillor Ben-Hassel to ask a question relating to Environmental Enforcement. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained any option would consider how the service provider would deal with fly-tipping as a first contact to check whether there was any evidence that could lead to a Fixed Penalty Notice; this was a provision in the current contract. Members heard that evidence of this kind was relatively rare, but there were aspirations that the new specification sought a proactive approach to fly-tipping that was not just reactive to reports. Councillor Ben-Hassel asked if it had been considered that there be better join up between reporting and investigating systems for fly-tipping. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that this was an aspiration for the future service and would be included in the method statement for this element.

Councillor Ben-Hassel asked if it had been considered if the contract could be broken up to be tackled by multiple specialist contractors and the Chair asked what outcomes had been seen from soft market testing. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the market had moved to a more risk

adverse approach due to market volatility, especially around the disposal of recyclates. Members were informed that guaranteed income was being considered for the new specification, alongside separating out disposal of recyclates from the main contract. The Sub-Committee heard that there was some nervousness around the decarbonisation of fleets, and that the Council needed to be careful about how electric or alternative fuel vehicles were considered for the future service.

The Chair asked how data sharing between contractor and Council systems would work for the future service. The Director for Sustainable Communities explained the current system had fully automated integration between the two systems that allowed for data analysis on fly-tipping hotspots and areas of repeated missed collections. Members heard that this would be continued in the future delivery of the service, but that consideration needed to be given as to what was required to tighten this up further.

The Director for Sustainable Communities explained that the Council owned the current Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) fleet, and had licensed them to the existing contractor. In response to questions about recruitment of HGV drivers in the context of shortages, Members heard that any prospective bidders for the contract would need to explain measures that would be used to address this, however, it was acknowledged that this was a national issue.

The Vice-Chair asked what collaboration was taking place with the Housing department on collections for estates. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that they had recently attended the Tenants and Leaseholder Panel to speak about the Council's Housing Stock, and that it was understood that a Housing Waste Infrastructure review was needed to understand what had changed to ensure adequate bin provision; this would then feed into the future service delivery.

Members raised concerns about inflationary pressures on wages that had come close to causing industrial disputes under the current contract. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that indexation and inflation would be important aspects of any new contract that these elements would be up to date with best industry practice. Members heard that cost of delivering the service was discussed during annual reviews under the current contract, which could lead to elements being renegotiated, and it was important that any new service delivery made similar allowances.

The Sub-Committee asked if there were any non-essential aspects of the contract and heard that a great deal of the contract was statutory provision, with other elements mandated by GLA Collection Conformity. Street Cleansing was in line with best practice and there was scope to reduce the quality here to deliver savings, but it was questioned whether this was desirable. There were services in the contract that were non-statutory and were chargeable, and these included Bulky Waste and Garden Waste collections.

The Vice-Chair asked about how communication and engagement with residents could be improved. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that there was a South London Waste Partnership communication and engagement plan, but that there needed to be a consideration of targeted communications on what was needed for Croydon. It was highlighted that the Residual Composition Analysis suggested that there needed to be better engagement and education on recycling, which could help with communal waste collections to maximise the collection of recyclates and resultant income.

Members asked about assisted bin collections and the Director of Sustainable Communities explained that a review of assisted collections had taken place recently to understand where these were still required. The review had reduced the number of assisted collections and going forward it was hoped this would be undertaken every couple of years as this had not been the case previously. The Cabinet Member for Streets & Environment explained that they had undertaken walkabouts with crews and assisted collections had been identified as an issue due to the large number that had accrued before the review. The Sub-Committee suggested that those who only needed the service for a short time should be able to state this when they applied for it.

The Chair asked how it would be ensured that the current service was maintained to a sufficient level until the end of the existing contract in 2025. Members heard that performance would be monitored, as it had been, in addition to the continued use of the performance bond. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the current contractor would also likely want to bid for any new contract, which would incentivise good performance.

The Chair asked about hotspots for missed collections, poor street cleansing and fly-tipping, and heard that these were monitored through daily conversations with the contractor to see what could be done to address identified area through targeted responses. The Sub-Committee heard that fly-tipping was a challenge in the North of the borough, and this was difficult to tackle given the requirements of needing to witness perpetrators in the act; there was an aspiration to try more innovative ways to tackle fly-tipping and change behaviours as part of any future service delivery. The Cabinet Member for Streets & Environment explained that they were keen to educate residents on reporting through the proper channels to try to build good data on hotspots so that they could be better tackled; work on this had already begun with residents groups, and would hopefully continue with 'Street Champions'.

The Vice-Chair asked about resident awareness of the bulky waste collection service and whether better awareness, or reduced charges, could result in lower levels of fly-tipping. The Director of Sustainable Communities acknowledged that there were probably some residents who were not aware of the service; having been through periods when the service was free and charged, as it was currently, had not shown an impact on the levels of fly-tipping in the borough. The Chair asked about cases where fly-tips had been reported, and then moved on to private land by contractors; the Director of

Sustainable Communities responded that this was not acceptable and that they would look into this personally.

Members highlighted cases where residents were required to separate different types of waste by different bags, and replacement bags were not being provided in a timely manner. It was asked if this type of collection would continue under a new service or this would be replaced with wheelie bins. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the vast majority of properties did use a wheelie bin, but a bagged service was provided to some properties who were unable to accommodate wheelie bins; the challenge around the bag service was that bags were provided by the contractor and it was acknowledged there could be delayed. The Sub-Committee heard that this was a performance issue that could be picked up with the contractor. Wheelie bins were the preferred solution, and any individual cases of kerbside properties that could accommodate bins using a bag service would be looked at on a case-by-case basis.

The Chair invited Councillor Ben-Hassel to ask a question about whether Bulky Waste collection would be looked at from a social enterprise perspective to enable the reuse of waste items. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that this was already something that the Council considered but that more could be done to innovate on 'circular economy' practices under any new service delivery.

Councillor Ben-Hassel asked what the Planning department could do about flats above shops without the necessary waste infrastructure under the upcoming Review of the Local Plan. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that there was a limited amount that the planning authority could do for these types of development and acknowledged that this was a challenge. There was limited provision for off-street bins, but Members heard that there were conversations that could take place with freeholders and shops. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that this was a planning consideration for these types of application but this was a complex area.

The Chair asked how Members would be able to collaboratively feed into the process going forward, in lieu of a cross party working group. The Director of Sustainable Communities explained that the Resident Survey results would be used, alongside the points raised at Sub-Committee meetings to inform the development of the contract. It was explained that a holistic approach was preferred over Member focus groups as it was felt that this would provide more representative data from a larger set of Croydon residents that also included Councillors. Preliminary feedback from the Resident Survey had only just been received, and focus groups with residents would be meeting to discuss issues raised in the survey alongside telephone interviews; this would be combined into a report that would be completed in April 2023.

## **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee were of the view that officers and the Cabinet Member had a good understanding of the work that needed to happen, but Members acknowledged that it was a challenging market for Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing.

## **Recommendations**

1. The Sub-Committee recognised the large number of households in the Borough that used communal bins, and recommended that this was a focus in the specification of the Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract Specification.
2. The Sub-Committee recommended that a dynamic approach to behavioural changes was adapted as a part of any future service delivery to ensure effective engagement and communications with residents.
3. The Sub-Committee recommended that there was a continuation of an 'as-is' service for residents in terms of collection frequency.

## **13/23 Cabinet Report - Local Planning Authority Service Transformation**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 29 to 120 of the agenda, which provided the Cabinet report on Local Planning Authority Service Transformation. The Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery (SCRER) introduced the item and went through the presentation, appended to these minutes, on the report that covered the findings of the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review (Appendix 1 of the Cabinet report) and the Council's response to its recommendations.

The Chair asked how the workstreams would be managed and prioritised. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained this was still in its very early stages, but that there would be a project plan for each workstream. Members heard that the appointment of the Planning Improvement Manager was key and would follow building capacity for transformation into the service. Once the Planning Improvement Manager was in post, the workstreams, project plans and programme would be established; as part of this, how to monitor and report on progress would be considered. The Chair asked if every recommendation from the PAS review would be addressed, and the Corporate Director of SCRER explained that the review was a snapshot of the service and that the recommendations would need to be prioritised, with most of them directly addressed.

The Vice-Chair queried the Planning Department's current strategy and asked how resources would be prioritised over the coming months. The Chair enquired how the tensions between the budget, delivery of services and

transformation would be managed. The Corporate Director of SCRER responded that there had been reductions in the number of staff and shortfalls in income generated by planning applications, which had made it difficult to resource the service and address capacity issues. There had been a budget correction of £1 million in recognition that income targets had been less than what had been achieved. Members heard that there was a continuing risk of reduced income from a downturn in planning applications.

Members asked what checks and balances were being put in place to ensure the department remained resilient. The Corporate Director of SCRER highlighted the importance of correctly resourcing the department, and noted the particular pressures that had been felt during the pandemic. Members heard that improvements to efficiencies, processes and IT were important to make workloads more manageable for staff. The Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration explained that the PAS review, Mayor's Business Plan and National Policy changes would all be used to inform transformation plans. The Cabinet Member highlighted the strong governance structures in place for the programme and importance of workforce development in ensuring it was a success.

The Vice-Chair asked how different the service was now in comparison to when the PAS review was conducted, and the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration explained that the department was on an improvement journey, and was making good progress. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that recruitment to planning roles was a national challenge, particularly in London, and that work to clear the backlog of planning applications was ongoing, but that progress was being made. The Chair asked how well the backlog was being managed, and the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that headway had been made in reducing the backlog from roughly 1800 to below 1000 over the last 12 months. Members heard that around 800 live applications was thought to be a manageable amount. The backlog had been reviewed to ascertain the age of applications and it had been found around 2/3 were 'out of time', with around 1/3 'in time'; the Sub-Committee heard that the aspiration was to flip these ratios. Clearance weeks were taking place roughly once a month to help reduce the backlog, and recently had also been used to also review the 'out of time' applications to analyse why these had not yet been determined. Members heard this had been successful in making progress for these older applications and that learning from each clearance week was taken forward to improve processes. The Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration highlighted the digitalisation workstream and explained that it was hoped this would further help with prioritising applications for determination in future.

The Sub-Committee asked about references to 'Vexatious Complainants' and the Corporate Director of SCRER explained that this report had been written by an independent panel and the term had been used to refer to persistent complaints that had been thought to be unfounded upon investigation. The Chair noted that the service was struggling to respond to complaints in a timely manner, and asked about the possible risks of this. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that response times had improved, but that



some complaints were complex, and required detailed responses which could take time to fully investigate; it was highlighted that responding to complaints also needed to be carefully balanced with determining applications. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration added that complaints could be complicated and entangled with enforcement issues, which could draw out the length of time it took to respond.

The Chair asked about Resident Engagement meetings and heard that these were held twice a year, however, were not a statutory requirement; Members heard a Developer Forum was also held twice a year. Resident Engagement meetings were in person, as it was felt this assisted in breaking down barriers, but it was acknowledged that hybrid meetings could be easier for some residents for a variety of reasons. The Sub-Committee heard that the Director for Planning & Sustainable Regeneration was working with the Cabinet Member and Mayor about how these meetings would look going forward. The Chair highlighted the accessibility needs of some residents that could be better met through a hybrid provision. The Sub-Committee asked the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration to ensure Ward Councillors were invited to Resident Engagement meetings going forward.

The Vice-Chair asked about the review of houses in multiple occupation (HMO) policies. The Corporate Director of SCRER responded that the HMO policy could be provided in writing outside of the meeting, and explained that there was a difference between planning policy, how planners looked at conversions to HMOs and the conditions inside of HMOs. The Local Plan Review would look at the cumulative impact of the proliferation of HMOs in the borough, but the private-sector Housing department were responsible for looking at the conditions inside of HMOs.

The Vice-Chair highlighted the loss of retail units on highstreets where conversions to HMOs took place. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that there had not been a great deal of this kind of Permitted Development in Croydon Town Centre, but acknowledged that this was a concern for District Centres. An Article 4 had been considered for Croydon, but Members heard that the Government had set the bar for this at such a high level that it was thought not to be achievable; an Article 4 also required sign off from the Secretary of State. The Sub-Committee heard that other London authorities had applied for Article 4s and that these had been curtailed dramatically or rejected entirely. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration stated that they would keep an eye on this area, but that in their opinion applying for an Article 4 was not a wise use of resources at this time. The Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration explained that there were a large number of properties in the borough that had been converted to HMOs without permission that were only just being discovered, and that the Council was becoming stricter on its granting of HMO Licences, and engaging in greater levels of enforcement activity.

The Chair invited Councillor Ben-Hassel to ask a question regarding a previous Article 4 impacting houses with more than three bedrooms and whether this would be revoked. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained

that the scope and timeline for the Review of the Local Plan would be brought to the next Cabinet Meeting; the review would look at the impacts and successes of existing policy and how these could be built on to meet objectives around HMOs. On whether HMO Licensing fees would be increased, the Sub-Committee heard that these had not been increased this year.

The Chair asked how housing targets would be met in light of the proposed removal of intensification areas. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that the small site development target of 641 units per year would be retained; intensification would still occur, despite the areas being removed, but the approach would shift to focus on character over density. Housing targets were on track to be met, and the Five Year Housing Land Supply had been met for the last year.

The Chair asked if there was sufficient resource had been allocated to tackle the six workstreams in the transformation programme. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that greater capacity was always desirable, but that funding had been allocated to the programme and was currently sufficient. Members heard that some aspects of the programme, particularly digitalisation, might require more funding than had currently been allocated; if there was a business case to do so, it may be the case that transformation funding from other areas could be redirected to the Planning transformation programme. In response to questions on how the Review of the Local Plan would be funded, the Sub-Committee heard that an earmarked reserve for this was built into the budget.

The Chair asked what options were being considered in the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) review. Members heard that the review would look at the collection of monies rather than allocation, ensuring processes and systems were correct, and that training and oversight for staff was in place. The Chair asked if officers were confident that the CIL funding formula was correct, and the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that this had been correct at the time it was set up, and broadly worked, but that there were improvements that could be made. Correct and timely collection of CIL was highlighted as an important income stream.

The Chair asked about the absence of enforcement in the Head of Development job description, and Members heard that a Deputy Head of service role had been deleted since the job description was written, and replaced with a 'Team Leader of Enforcement' which had been found to be insufficient. This was being reviewed as part of the transformation programme to ensure there was sufficient senior capacity and oversight for enforcement. The Sub-Committee queried the unfunded role in paragraph 2.11, on page 58 of the agenda pack; the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained this would be funded by CIL administration monies and Pre-Application Advice fees.

Members asked about the deployment of temporary staff to address the enforcement backlog. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration

explained that temporary staff in enforcement only covered for vacant positions, and highlighted the national difficulties in recruiting to enforcement posts. Members heard that there was ongoing work to revise the job description for the 'Deputy Team Leader' post to turn this into a 'Team Leader' post, so that a permanent staff member could be recruited. Recruitment had been ongoing, with a permanent member of staff due to fill the last open vacancy soon. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that agency staff were helping to manage current caseloads and reduce the backlog by participating in clearance weeks, and closing down cases where possible. The Corporate Director of SCRER highlighted the busy nature of planning in Croydon, and the importance of ensuring enforcement officers prioritised cases. In response to questions about the size of the enforcement department, the Corporate Director of SCRER explained that the service was small for the size of the borough. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration highlighted the importance of providing development opportunities for enforcement staff going forward.

The Vice-Chair asked about the planned actions for Q1 2023/24 under 'Review the Resourcing of the Planning Service' on page 107 of the agenda, and raised concerns that these had not yet commenced. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that the backlog had already been reduced without additional resource. Members heard that the Planning Improvement Manager would be looking at programme management, workstreams and ensuring that progress was taking place; budget for this had already been approved and the recruitment process had begun. The budget correction that had taken place did not provide additional resource to the service, and it was acknowledged that it would be a challenge for the department to deliver transformation with the small amount of transformation funding and existing resources it had. The Chair asked if this was reasonable and whether transformation could be delivered within current resource. The Corporate Director of SCRER responded that greater capacity and resourcing was desirable, but that a great deal was possible with the existing resources of the department. Members heard that the Government was consulting on planning fees, which could potentially increase the resources available should these increase. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that better IT implementation and efficiencies would speed up determinations and increase officer productivity. The Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration highlighted a number of quick wins in digitalisation that were attainable for the service.

The Chair highlighted the importance of staff welfare and Members asked how frequently staff were working overtime, and whether they were compensated or given time in lieu. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that a great number of staff worked beyond their contracted hours, and that it was important to set boundaries to ensure staff were not overburdening themselves; staff were provided compensation or time in lieu as appropriate for overtime. The Chair asked about staff turnover, and heard that this had been higher over the last couple of years, but that there were many staff members who had been in Croydon for significant periods of time, and staff who had left and come back. The PAS review had

acknowledged comradery between officers in the department, and the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration acknowledged the importance of developing officers and providing a compelling offer to keep staff in Croydon; Members heard that this would be a focus of the transformation programme.

In response to a question from the Chair about the consistency of responses to applications, appeals and enquiries, the Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that consistency was ensured through strong processes that were in place to manage this, using a multi-disciplinary approach for complex applications. Further evidence for this was demonstrated by a strong track record with appeals.

The Chair asked about the implication of national policy changes for Croydon. The Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration explained that national policy changes were always being considered by Government, and that the department kept abreast of proposed changes, making changes to respond to new policy where required. The Government were keen to encourage digitalisation, which formed a workstream in the transformation programme, but there were no large changes to national policy on the horizon.

The Chair asked about what lessons could be learned from other internal transformation projects, and from other planning authorities. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that PAS reports were useful resources in directing transformation programmes, and that focussing on workforce and digitalisation would be key in transforming the Planning service.

## **Conclusions**

The Sub-Committee were of the view that the digitalisation and workforce workstreams would be key in ensuring that transformation of the Planning department was successful, and that the Sub-Committee should continue to monitor progress in these areas.

The Sub-Committee were keen to receive a briefing on the proposed CIL review, and were of the view that this should be an addition to the 2023/24 work programme.

The Sub-Committee concluded that they should be provided with a written copy of the Council's HMO Policy.

## **Recommendations.**

The Sub-Committee recommended that Councillors be invited to attend future Resident Engagement events.

**14/23      Period 8 Financial Performance Report**

The Sub-Committee considered a report set out on pages 121 to 164 of the agenda that provided the Cabinet Report on Period 8 Financial Performance for Members to ascertain whether they are reassured about the delivery of the 2022-23 Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economic Recovery Budget.

The Chair asked about risks and opportunities outlined in the report for the SCRER department. The Corporate Director of SCRER explained that some of the risks were around Capital recharges; income at risk from difficulty recruiting civil enforcement officers; parking income; and additional energy costs. Members heard that agency staff were being used to fill civil enforcement officer roles, and there were efforts to convert agency staff to permanent employment after a period of time. Opportunities for SCRER were around using CIL to support revenue expenditure; highways savings; parking income; and recharges to the Housing Revenue Account. The Chair asked where CIL would be used to support revenue expenditure and Members were informed that this used to address, in part, where development in the borough was increasing demand on services.

On Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Cameras, the Corporate Director of SCRER explained that School Streets and Healthy Neighbourhoods cameras continued to be rolled out, but it was acknowledged that there had been delays due to operational and functional issues. The Sub-Committee heard that work was ongoing with contractors to ensure this is progressed.

**15/23      Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-23**

The Sub-Committee noted the report.

The meeting ended at 9.29 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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# Planning Transformation Programme

**March 2023**

# PAS Report





# Planning Advisory Service

The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) provides consultancy and peer support, learning events and online resources to help local authorities understand and respond to planning reform.

- Funded by the Local Government Association
- Act as critical friend to Local Planning Authorities

# Peer Challenge and DM Process Review

- PAS Invited by the Council – as ‘critical friends’
- Not an inspection or audit

PAS worked with the Planning Service based on self-assessment, wider document review, on-site interviews, and focus groups

- Committee Member training:
  - Defendable Decision Making
  - 5 Year Housing Land Supply

# PAS Looked at...

- Development management performance.
- Efficiencies and effectiveness of Planning Committee
- Enforcement
- Relationship with customers and management of complaints
- Planning staff structures

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These were examined across five broad themes covering:

1. Vision and leadership
2. Service Performance & Management
3. Community engagement
4. Partner engagement
5. Achieving outcomes

# Over- arching messages

- *There is a significant breakdown in communication and trust between Officers, Members and the public HOWEVER you have a great opportunity to reset and rebuild that trust and strengthen leadership*
- *The Planning Dept is under resourced and if you continue as you are the service will break and everyone will suffer as a consequence. Planning is a major income source but it must be sufficiently resourced to generate income*
- *Whilst many of your practices and procedures are very good, others are causing you to work inefficiently and these must be changed in parallel with a review of resources*
- *There is a clear willingness from officers and Members to learn from elsewhere and from each other – embrace this*

# Vision & Leadership

## Strengths

- The Planning service has some excellent practices and clearly has experienced, knowledgeable and dedicated staff
- Chair of Planning is keen to learn from best practice and there is a willingness by Members to learn from other authorities.
- Both officers and members want to change Planning Committee to have shorter/more productive meetings
- SPD2 will be withdrawn and opportunity for officers and members to work together to rebuild trust and be confident of making sound decisions
- Member training is valued and there is a commitment to ongoing training
- Manifestos in the Local Election recognised the need for change. There is an opportunity to de-politicise Planning with the right Leadership approach

# Vision & Leadership

## Areas for Improvement

- The service is currently firefighting and losing. Take a strategic view on efficiencies and best use of available resources.
- There is a need to re-build trust and relationships: Members Officers - Residents
- Planning sub committee not clearly understood and felt to be unnecessary
- A need to invest in staff – Training and Mentoring
- Officers and Members are the subject of personal attack

# Vision & Leadership

## Recommendations

- The Planning transformation is part of a Corporate transformation. Consequences to under resourcing and recognition of the income generation
- Improve engagement with residents, partners and developers. Consider additional Comms resource and a strategy to counter the negative narrative that has become the norm including 'Inside Croydon'
- Learn from best practice elsewhere - PAS as an option for member training
- Invest in staff to ensure retention and consider mentoring for key staff
- Utilise the willingness on all sides to re-set relationships and trust between officers and members. This should result in shorter more productive Planning meetings

# Service Performance & Management

## Strengths

- High quality of officers – professional and dedicated
- Very high quality and clear officer reports
- Some good experiences from developers on the pre app process
- Some sound processes and procedures in place
- Current staffing structure (rather than actual staff numbers) meets the Planning requirements of Croydon.



# Service Performance & Management

## Areas for improvement

- Rethink Validation process
- IT is set up is not fit for purpose and wastes resources
- Too much management time taken up with complaints and issues with vexatious complainants
- Responses to enforcement enquiries are not meeting resident's and Member expectations
- Poor communication on CIL and S106 spend leads to mistrust within the community
- Lack of internal consultee support impacting on performance and sound decision making e.g. Legal advice is harming delivery and risking reputation

# Service Performance & Management

## Recommendations

- Review approach to validation - performance versus customer service.
- Focus on IT investment as part of a wider transformation programme for the Council to speed up processes and avoid wasteful use of officer time
- Review management capacity in Enforcement to meet Member and residents' expectations
- Carry out an enforcement 'blitz' to reduce number of cases and refocus cases in accordance with the priorities set out in the enforcement policy

# Community engagement

## Strengths

- Some good relationships built with individual officers
- Members and Officers want to rebuild trust with the community
- Residents and agents forums are held
- Engaged and active residents associations

# Community engagement

## Areas for improvement

- A complete breakdown in relationships. Need to do the basics right on communication and engagement e.g. answer the phone, emails etc
- Lack of communication has created suspicion and lack of transparency that has created a breakdown in trust
- Personal attacks has undermined confidence, impacted wellbeing and affected ability to recruit

# Community engagement

## Recommendations

- Develop a strategy for effective engagement and communication to rebuild trust
- Undertake targeted enforcement initiatives that demonstrated delivery to the public and Members
- Carry out some quick wins with the community e.g. Website improvements and customer response times
- Provide transparency on how the Council implements the 'Chinese wall' and other conflicts of interest.
- Embrace residents' desire to get involved and work with Planning so that it is a positive relationship

# Partnership engagement

## Strengths

- Good relationships between individual officers and consultees
- Consultees / stakeholders think well of individual planning officers
- Pre-app and PPAs considered well by agents for Major developments

# Partnership engagement

## Areas for improvement

- Regular meetings to discuss issues, use this as training for more junior staff
- Lack of confidence from junior officers to make decisions
- There is the opportunity to upskill all officers, learn from each other
- Build workflows/processes, set timescales, stick to them
- Work more closely internally, Why recharges?
- PPA funding is not being maximised and an important income source is potentially being lost

# Partnership engagement

## Recommendations

- Time management – standard responses, standing advice, standard conditions, basic training and upskilling
- Refocus pre app and PPAs procedures to provide better service to customer and maximise income
- Continue Major/Strategic apps meeting. Training tool for junior officers,
  - Re-instate regular liaison / catch ups with internal and external consultees
  - Flow chart – engage with internal consultees, so they know what advice you expect from them
  - Assess consultations – Can officers upskill to do minors. Review who you consult and why



# Achieving outcomes

## Strengths

- Sound scheme of delegation
- The process of the Local Plan Review is an example of good plan making
- The willingness of Members to engage in the review of the strategy and the benefits of the local approach to the London Plan intensification policy.
- Members are keen to undertake training and learn from elsewhere on all areas of Planning
- Dedicated and knowledgeable Planning officers to deliver the Council's objectives

# DM Planning Transformation Action Plan

**The recommendations of the PAS reviews have been grouped in the following areas:**

- Resource and Performance Management
- Technological Improvements
- Officer Training, Development, Morale, and Retention
- Internal Process Review
- Communication and Engagement
- Planning Policy, Procedure Development
- Planning Committee

# Planning Transformation Programme

# Planning Transformation Programme

- Responds to successive budget savings
- Responds to the Mayor's Business Plan
- Responds to National Planning Policy changes
- Responds to Corporate Governance Reviews
- Appointment of a Planning Improvement Manager to provide capacity and resource and drive delivery

# Mayors Business Plan

**Outcome 2: Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning**

**Outcome 4: Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we're proud**

## **1. Priority: Support the regeneration of Croydon's town and district centres, seeking inward investment and grants**

The Council will work with businesses and residents to develop a new, sustainable plan to regenerate Croydon town centre that responds to changes in the retail and leisure industry. Together we will develop collaborative strategies, seek inward investment and apply for grants to revive our high streets and district hubs, and unleash Croydon's economic potential.

With our partners we will:

- Develop and deliver a clear shared vision with businesses, developers and residents to steer our town centre and high street recovery.
- Launch an exciting inward investment campaign for Croydon to attract new businesses and jobs in growth sectors.

## **4. Priority: Ensure new homes are safe, well-designed and in keeping with the local area**

New development will be design-led, not density-led. While we must continue to plan for new homes, schemes must respect the views of local people, enhance the character of our places, and recognise the need for amenity space.

We will:

- Review Croydon's Local Plan to remove intensification zones, support sustainable development and emphasise design and character over density.
- Revoke the SPD2 Suburban Design Guide.
- Review conservation areas to ensure the borough's special places are protected for generations to come.
- Review the planning and enforcement service to identify the resources needed to improve the service for customers.
- Enforce policies to tackle the cumulative impact of houses in multiple occupation.

# Governance and initial scope of programme

