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Scrutiny & Overview Committee

Meeting held on Tuesday, 7 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), Mike Bonello, Richard Chatterjee (reserve for Jade Appleton) and Joy Prince

Also Present: Councillor Hamida Ali, Stuart King, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Jade Appleton

PART A

64/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meetings**

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 9 February, 6 July and 17 August 2021 were agreed as a correct record.

It was noted that the minutes for the meeting held on 15 June 2021 would be signed off at the next Committee meeting.

At this stage of the meeting, the Chair thanked Councillor Shafi Khan, who had stepped down from the Committee, and welcomed Councillor Mike Bonello who had been appointed in his place.

65/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

66/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

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

67/21 **Scrutiny Improvement Programme**

The Committee considered a report which set out the next steps for implementing the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review. The improvement plan had been prepared by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the Deputy Chief Executive from the organisation, Ed Hammond, was in attendance to introduce the report.

During the introduction it was noted that the process for implementing the recommendations had received extensive consultation with both councillors and senior officers. This included the report being endorsed by the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the Scrutiny Improvement Reference Group.

The initial focus for the improvement plan was to ensure the scrutiny function was fit for purpose and was able to play a beneficial role in the Council's recovery. As such it was recommended that Scrutiny focussed its attention on business-critical activities, such as ensuring the Council was able to deliver a balanced budget, ensuring there was an understanding of the strategic risks and that the Council continued to support residents through Adult Social Care, Children Services and the economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

To ensure that Scrutiny was able to effectively focus its work programme it was proposed that a regular information digest would be made available to scrutiny members. The digest would contain a range of performance and financial information that would be used to identify areas in need of further scrutiny. It was also proposed that the work programme was managed by the group consisting of the three Scrutiny Chairs and three work-stream leads. It was envisaged that the information digest and the Work Programming Group would be implemented prior to the next cycle of Committee meetings in October.

Training would also form a key strand of the improvement programme, with a range of sessions and other work being arranged for both Members and officers. The scope of the training would range from introductory sessions on the purpose of scrutiny to more work specific training on areas such as budget scrutiny. It was confirmed that the training would start to be scheduled as soon as possible.

Given that the improvement programme was introducing new ways of working, a mini review was planned after the first two cycles of meetings to ensure that the new processes were fit for purpose. It was also likely that these processes would continue to evolve to reflect the needs of the Council.

The Committee agreed to endorse the improvement programme and passed it thanks on to the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny and the council officers who had been heavily involved in the preparation of the report.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Improvement Programme be endorsed.

68/21 **Finance Performance Report**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on financial performance and the delivery of the Council's budget at the end of June 2021 (month 3). This report had previously been reviewed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 16 August 2021. It had been provided to Committee to ensure it was aware of the Council's latest financial position and to allow the opportunity to identify areas for further scrutiny.

At the start of the item, the Chair welcomed the Council's new Section 151 Officer, Richard Ennis and invited him to introduce the report. During the introduction, the following points were noted: -

- Although the budget position reported at the end of month 3 was favourable, it was cautioned that it was still very early in the financial year which made forecasting more challenging.
- The report identified £10.6m worth of risks linked to the robustness of the savings identified for delivering during 2021-22.
- Further work was needed in Housing and Gateway as there was pressure on the budgets in these departments. It was acknowledged that it would be a challenge to reduce the budget variance in demand led services such as Housing and Gateway.
- Other areas of risk included funding for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport, both of which were high demand services.

At the conclusion of the introduction, the Chair of the Committee suggested that, using the new scrutiny work programming process, the challenges highlighted should be taken away for further investigation to identify where Scrutiny could add value.

In response to a query about the level of savings required to be found from the budget for UASC, it was reported that the Government had agreed to make a one-off exceptional payment of £2.35m towards the cost of funding UASC support. Although this good news was welcomed, it was also recognised that a one-off payment would not resolve the long-term underfunding of UASC support by the Government.

It was suggested that consideration should be given to the presentation of data in future financial performance reports to ensure that they could be easily understood by the public. Further information about how budget overspends would be managed in demand led services was also requested for future reports. It was also suggested that there may be a role for the Scrutiny Sub-Committees to investigate in further detail how budgets were being managed in demand led services.

As it was noted that the report presented the financial performance as of June 2021, it was questioned whether work was underway to shorten the interval between the month end and producing the monitoring reports. It was advised that there was an aim to lessen the timespan between month end and reporting, but in doing so it was important to ensure that the accuracy and resilience of the data was not compromised. Confirmation that the Council was working towards shorter timeframes for reporting financial data was welcomed by the Committee.

At the conclusion of this item, the Chair thanked Cabinet Members and officers for their engagement with the Committee. It was also reiterated that

the challenges highlighted during the introduction would be taken away for further investigation.

69/21 **Report in the Public Interest - Quarter 2 Update**

The Committee considered a report which presented the progress made in delivering the recommendations set out in the Report in the Public Interest (RIPI). The report also providing the outcome arising from the work of the Internal Audit team to verify the delivery of the actions that had been marked as completed.

The report was introduced by the Leader of the Council, Councillor Hamida Ali, who highlighted that 60% of the actions listed in the report had now been completed, which was an increase of 10% since the first quarterly report. The Internal Audit review had largely confirmed the delivery of these actions, but where questions had been raised responses had been given. It was hoped that the work of Internal Audit would give reassurance to the Committee on the progress that had been made to date.

The Committee was pleased to note the progress that had been made with implementing the recommendations arising from the Report in the Public Interest (RIPI). However, there was concern that some items, such as the monthly reporting framework, were marked as complete when they still needed to be embedded in the organisation as 'business as usual'. As such it was agreed that further consideration needed to be given to how this could be accurately reported.

It was highlighted that there was concern about the report being submitted meetings of both the Committee and the General Purposes and Audit Committee (GPAC). It was agreed that there needed to be a clearly defined purpose for both Committee to review the report to prevent duplication. The Chair advised that he would raise this with the new Independent Chair of GPAC, once they had been appointed, to find a way forward.

At the conclusion of this item, the Chair thanked the Cabinet Members and officers for their engagement with the questions of the Committee and the progress made in delivering the RIPI recommendations.

Resolved: That:-

1. Progress made with delivering the recommendations arising from the Report in the Public Interest is noted.
2. The Chair of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reviews future consideration of the Report in the Public Interest updates, to ensure that duplication with the work of the General Purposes and Audit Committee is avoided.

Community Safety Strategy

The Committee considered a report which presented the principles under consideration for the new Community Safety Strategy. The new strategy needed to be finalised and agreed by Cabinet by the end of the year, when the existing strategy expired.

At the start of this item, the Chair thanked the officers and partners involved in the development of the new Community Safety Strategy for their engagement with the Committee in the lead up to the meeting, which had helped to ensure Members were familiar with the rationale for the strategy. In the lead up to the meeting, the Committee had held briefings with the following partners to discuss their role in the creation of the Strategy: -

- Selene Grandison – Head of Probation Delivery Unit (HM Prison & Probation Service)
- Lewis Kelly – Performance & Intelligence Manager (Croydon Council)
- Alison Kennedy – Operation Manager for the Family Justice Centre (Croydon Council)
- Chief Inspector Craig Knight – Metropolitan Police
- Haydar Muntadhar – Prevent Manager (Croydon Council)
- Steve Phaure – Chief Executive – Croydon Voluntary Action
- Christopher Rowney – Head of the Violence Reduction Unit (Croydon Council)

The Strategy was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery, Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed. During the introduction it was highlighted that the previous Community Safety Strategy was due to expire on 31 December 2021, having previously been extended by a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The themes being proposed for the new strategy had been informed by the Strategic Assessment and other community safety focussed reviews. A draft of the new strategy was in development, with a final version due to be considered by Cabinet in November.

Following the introduction, the Committee was given the opportunity to comment upon and ask questions about the new strategy. The first comment highlighted that the delivery of many of the targets in the previous strategy had been outside the control of the Council which resulted in them being missed. It was accepted that with an area reliant on a large amount of partnership working such as community safety, it would not be possible to have control over the delivery of every target, but the targets did need to be specific and measurable wherever possible. It was confirmed that a performance framework would be developed for the new strategy using the

Strategic Assessment. The new Programme Board overseeing the delivery of the strategy would have detailed indicators that would be closely monitored.

It was noted from the briefings with the partners in the lead up to the meeting, that partnership work was often identified as a strength. As such, it was questioned what the strategy could do to enhance the effectiveness of the partnership. It was advised that by basing the strategy on the Strategic Assessment, it would ensure the development of a stronger performance framework, allowing partners to challenge performance where appropriate.

In response to a question about whether the Children Service needed to improve its performance on reporting domestic violence, it was highlighted that everyone could have a better understanding of domestic violence. Underreporting of domestic violence was a national issue, along with other issues such as victim blaming. The Domestic Abuse Service did provide training for both internal and external partners, but further consideration was needed on how this could be extended through the strategy. The Committee agreed that if Croydon wanted to take the lead on tackling domestic violence it would require all partners to step up, with referral levels suggested as a means of monitoring performance.

The Committee discussed the new legal responsibility to provide safe accommodation for those fleeing domestic abuse. It was clarified that this was not just the Council's responsibility, with it applying to accredited housing associations as well. The team was in conversation with local housing associations to ensure they were aware of their new responsibilities. It was highlighted that the new legislation also had implications for Children Services, with children now recognised as victims of domestic violence in their own right, which would require additional support to be provided.

The Committee welcomed the increased use of data to prioritise the delivery of the strategy. The fear of crime could often be an influence when setting Community Safety Strategies, but through using a data led approach, it would ensure that a proper assessment was carried out to ensure work was targeted to where it was most needed. The Committee was also supportive of the use of the Cambridge Crime Harm Index as a means of targeting activity towards those crimes that cause the most harm to local people.

The continued use of the public health approach to violence reduction was also welcomed, but it was acknowledged that part of this approach required measurable targets. Given the need for measurable targets, concern was raised about how success would be measured under themes such as reducing domestic violence. It was agreed that being able to identify the right targets was of key importance to the development of the new strategy.

In response to a question about why neither the fear of crime or knife crime appeared as themes in the strategy, it was confirmed that they were both included within the main themes. Fear of crime would be included under 'building resilience and confidence in the community', while the prevention of knife crime would come under a range of heading including anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. It was agreed that within the final version of

the strategy care needed to be taken to ensure that the descriptions used were clear for both partners and the public.

The decision to have objectives structured around overlapping strands was welcomed and the strategy needed to be focussed upon what the partners wanted to achieve, rather than broad targets. The strategy also needed to be addressing the root causes of crime with clear outcomes.

It was confirmed that hate crime would be addressed under the fourth theme, which focussed on resilience, trauma and trust. Work in this area would be targeted towards informing the community on what hate crime was and how to report it. Tackling the disproportionality in the criminal justice system would be one of the key themes in the new strategy, which would require a wider ranging response to address as disproportionality could be experienced early in life in the education system.

Concern was raised about the private rented sector, where many of the residents tended to be younger and more transient. It was requested that thought be given to those living in the private rented sector, as well as those in social housing. It was agreed that this area needed to be explored in greater detail to establish whether there was any significant issues, as at present there was an intelligence gap in this area.

It was questioned whether the Council would have its own action plan to ensure operational effectiveness in delivering the Strategy. It was confirmed there would be a multi-agency action plan that also took account of work the Council was delivering internally. Care would also be taken to ensure the strategy tied into other policies, strategies and partnerships. It was also confirmed that as the strategy cut across Cabinet portfolios, delivery would be taken on board as a shared responsibility.

At the conclusion of this item the Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, officers and those in the Community Safety Partnership who had given their time to ensure the Committee was able to effectively scrutinise the Community Safety Strategy.

Conclusions

At the end of its discussion of this item, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reached the following conclusions:-

1. The Committee was strongly supportive of the broad themes identified for the new strategy, agreeing that these were the correct ones for Croydon.
2. However, it was acknowledged that it would be a challenge to translate the strategy to an operational level that made a difference to the public in Croydon.

3. The Committee was satisfied that there was evidence to indicate there was strong partnership working amongst the partners in the Community Safety Partnership.
4. The Committee was encouraged that there was an acknowledgment of the importance to the delivery of the strategy of having both measurable and achievable targets.
5. It was agreed that the Committee would look to review the Community Safety Strategy after twelve months to ensure that it was having the intended impact, that the targets were effective in managing delivery.

71/21 **Cabinet Response to Recommendations from the Scrutiny & Overview Committee**

The Committee considered a report setting out the Cabinet response to recommendation made from Scrutiny. Concern was raised about the Cabinet response to the recommendation made on access to information, with it noted that the response was more restrictive than the statutory definition. It was highlighted that the Constitutional Working Group had looked at this issue and was committed to working to the statutory requirements.

Resolved: That the Cabinet response given to the recommendations of Scrutiny are noted.

72/21 **Scrutiny & Overview Work Programme 2021-22**

The Committee considered a report setting out its latest work programme for 2021-22. It was noted that there had been items considered earlier in the meeting that the Committee may wish to add to its work programme, but it was agreed that these items would be explored in further detail by the Scrutiny Chairs to establish whether further scrutiny was needed.

Resolved: That the current position of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee Work Programme 2021-22 is noted.

73/21 **Membership of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee**

The Committee considered a report requesting its agreement to adding a non-voting co-optee to membership of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee from the Croydon Adult Social Services User Group (CASSUP). The report also requested the Committee to confirm the appointment of the Vice-Chair of CASSUP, Yusuf Osman, to fill this newly created vacancy.

Resolved:- That

1. That a non-voting co-optee from the Croydon Adult Social Service User Panel be added to the membership of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee.

2. That the Vice-Chair of Croydon Adult Social Services User Panel be appointed to fill this co-optee role for the remained of 2021-22.

74/21 **Update on the Town Centre Task & Finish Group**

The Committee considered a report providing an update on the Town Centre Task and Finish Group, including a revision to the terms of reference for the Group to take account of a new Advisory Town Centre Board set up by the Cabinet in August 2021.

It was noted that an indicative end date for the completion of the Task and Finish Group had been set as February 2022. However, this would be kept under review and if more time was needed a request would be made to the Committee.

The Committee agreed the Town Centre Task and Finish Group would have five members, who would be Councillors Ben Hassel (C), Appleton, Carserides, Fitzsimons and Ward. The amended terms of reference were also agreed.

Resolved: That: -

1. The membership of Town Centre Task and Finish Group is agreed as set out above.
2. The changes to the terms of reference of the Town Centre Task and Finish Group are agreed.

75/21 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This motion was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.25 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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