

SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

Introduction

Chair of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee and Health & Social Care Sub-Committee

Councillor Sean Fitzsimons

This last year has been one of the most challenging years in Croydon Council history, and the work this generated is reflected in the last year's work programme. Over 1000 Croydon residents have died due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, with severe curtailing of public services and economic activity. At the same time, the Council has gone through significant financial turmoil with the Council's Section 151 Officer twice issuing a Section 114 Notice, and the External Auditor publishing a Report in the Public Interest over the Council finances and council-owned companies such as Brick by Brick, which resulted in the change of both the political and executive leadership of the Council. In addition, in March 2021, the ITV News report on the long-term disrepair and neglect of homes at the Regina Road exposed the Council's failings regarding its responsiveness and customer care.

The October 2020 Report in the Public Interest criticised all parts of the Council, including the actions of the Scrutiny Committee. The events of the last year have been a humbling experience, and the role as Chair is to ensure that we learn from this and improve the Council's governance arrangements to ensure more effective oversight in future.

The events of the last year show that Croydon Council faces several immense challenges over the next year. These include overhauling its current structures, setting up more effective control systems, and delivering a budget that ensures sustainable and safe services, with a renewed emphasis on customer care. Since October 2020, our work programme reflects these priorities and will continue to do so into 2021/22.

Scrutiny accepts that it needs to change if it is to carry out its governance role more effectively. In April 2020, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee asked the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) to review Croydon's scrutiny function. The Council had recently completed a Governance Review, and the cross-party group of scrutiny chairs felt that Scrutiny function could benefit from a review by an external professional organisation. The CfGS Report came to a meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on 30 March 2021. Their report incorporated lessons learnt from the Report in the Public Interest and ensured their recommendations supports the actions set out in the Council's Renewal Plan.

At the 30 March 2021 meeting, the Scrutiny & Overview Committee accepted the CfGS findings and their 13 recommendation. It further agreed to the CfGS suggestion that Scrutiny prioritises three recommendations designed to support the stabilisation of the authority and deliver a balanced budget in 2021/22, particularly in Adult Social Care and Children Services. We are grateful for the support the CfGS has provided to Scrutiny in developing our 2021/22 work programme. Our future

work programme includes a commitment to consider the voice of service users, carer/parents, and front-line workforce when reviewing services.

As the Chair of Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee, this year's essential task is to ensure that the Council achieves a sustainable reduction in expenditure in line with the agreed 2021-22 Budget. We will also continue to scrutinise the integration of health and adult social care services and the post-pandemic recovery of health and social care services in Croydon. Both have been a critical feature of last year's work programme and will continue to be a significant feature this year.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks for our Democratic Services Scrutiny Team's assistance and hard work and to thank the other Chairs of Scrutiny for their support and advice.

Chair of the Children & Young People Sub-Committee

Councillor Robert Ward

No sooner had the Council recovered from the 'inadequate' judgement of its Children's Services in 2017, achieving a Good assessment in February 2020, than the world was struck by the pandemic and locally the Council was found to be financially inadequate. The external auditors in their Report in the Public Interest of October 2020 specifically pointed out the failure to address overspends in children's social care. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee has played its part in ensuring that the services delivered to Croydon's children are maintained and improved in the face of these twin challenges.

The pandemic necessitated a move to online meetings, which have been found to be very effective. It is likely that these will continue in some form even when face-to-face meetings are again permitted, not least because it reduces barriers to the participation of service providers and service users in our meetings.

For information on the many subjects covered in our meetings I commend this report.

I would also like to thank the members of the Sub-Committee for their hard work and the officers who supported us so well over the past year.

Chair of the Streets, Environment & Housing Sub-Committee

Councillor Leila Ben Hassel

This year has been a difficult year for all, particularly for our staff who have gone above and beyond throughout the pandemic and then were faced with the aftermath of the council financial crisis dealing with increasing workloads, scarcer resources, juggling business as usual and additional work relating to the Improvement Plan. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our council staff, particularly our Scrutiny officers, Stephanie Davis and Simon Trevaskis, who have shown flexibility,

resilience and professionalism through the ever changing environment to support the work of the Streets Environment and Homes Sub-Committee.

The Report in the Public Interest has evidenced a lack of corporate governance and my focus this past year has been to champion access to data that underpinned decision making as well as ensuring that the determination of savings during the budget-setting process in the Place Department was robust and informed by benchmarking. Over the last municipal year, the Sub-Committee has covered a wide range of topics including the work of the Climate Crisis Commission, the Local Plan Review and the implications for Croydon of the government's proposed reform of the national planning system.

In times of crisis, there is a risk for any organisations to miss opportunities for radically transforming its services. Identifying opportunities to co-design with residents and the re-shaping of our provision is something I will ensure stays at the forefront of the Sub-Committee. This year's work programme will include the review of the South London Waste Partnership, management of our parks and green spaces, transport operators' post-covid plans but foremost there will be a focus on monitoring progress in the delivery of Croydon Renewal Plan. The Place Department has a track record of achieving its savings targets over the years so the focus in this coming year will not only be whether targets are achieved but monitoring the impact of these savings on the quality of services to our residents.

The incident at Regina Road has also brought to light a systemic failure to use tenants' feedback to drive continuous service improvement. Matters relating to housing will be a key component of this year's Sub-Committee work programme, working closely with the Tenants and Leaseholder Panel and the Tenants' Housing Scrutiny Panel. I will continue to ensure we enable greater participation of residents and stakeholders in work of the Streets Environment and Homes Sub-Committee.

I would like to thank all Sub-Committee members for their work and contributions over the past year and welcome new members appointed this municipal year, with whom I look forward to working with.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee directs the performance of all overview and scrutiny functions at the Council, including the development of procedures governing the operation of both the Committee and its Sub-Committees. It also has responsibility for scrutinising crime and disorder matters and flood risk management within the borough. The Committee will consider any call-in of Cabinet decisions other than those relating to education matters, which are heard by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

You can view the agendas, reports and minutes of this committee by clicking on the link: www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee



**Cllr Sean
Fitzsimons
(C)**



**Cllr Robert
Ward (VC)**



**Cllr Leila
Ben Hassel
(DC)**



**Cllr Jeet
Bains**

Until Nov 20



**Cllr Jerry
Fitzpatrick**



**Cllr Oni
Ovir**

From Nov 20



**Cllr Joy
Prince**

Scrutiny & Overview Committee – Work Programme 2020-21

Throughout 2020-21 the work of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee has primarily been focussed on helping the Council respond to its financial challenges. This has included reviewing the action plan prepared in response to the Report in the Public Interest issued by the Council's external auditor, reviewing the action plan from the review of the Council's companies and reviewing in detail the budget proposals for 2021-22.

Another area of work that has dominated the Committee's work plan during the year has been responding to call-in requests. In total five separate call-in requests were received, three of which are outlined in further detail below. The other two call-ins considered by the Committee concerned decisions taken on a Parking Charges Review – January 2021 (7 January meeting) and the closure of the Virgo Fidelis Convent Senior School (4 February meeting).

At its meeting on 30 March, the Committee was presented with the findings from the Scrutiny Improvement Review conducted by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. The review was initially commissioned by the Committee in March 2020 to accompany the wider review, but had been delayed to ensure that full account could be taken of the issues raised by Report in the Public Interest. Further information on the review is also provided below.

What follows below is a short summary of the highlights from the year, but for those who would like more information, full sets of agendas and minutes for each meeting

can be found on the Council's website at the following link [Scrutiny & Overview Committee – Agendas & Minutes](#)

Call-In: Key Decisions set out in Cabinet Reports 'Responding to the Local Government Funding Challenge' and 'July Financial Review' (25 August 2020)

In light of concerns about the size of the financial challenge facing the Council, it was agreed by the Committee that the key decisions set out in two separate Cabinet reports on the Council's finances would be called-in to allow for further scrutiny. The meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee to review these decisions was held on 25 August 2020.

At the meeting the Committee questioned the advice of the Council's Section 151 Officer regarding the Council's financial challenges, with assurance unable to be given on the delivery of the 2020-21 budget. The Committee was particularly interested to find out the reasons why this advice had changed since the Cabinet meeting in July. It was accepted that the uncertainty created by the covid-19 pandemic was having a significant impact on the Council's budget, which meant it was increasingly likely a Section 114 notice would need to be issued. The Committee welcomed the frank assessment of the Council's financial situation given by the Section 151 Officer and agreed that greater financial scrutiny was needed going forward to ensure greater fiscal responsibility was being taken across the Council.

Although the Committee concluded that no further action was needed, concern was raised that the funding gap could not be met by in-year savings and use of balances, and would only be met through the provision of additional Government support, in conjunction with the robust savings programme being developed.

Report in the Public Interest - Action Plan (8 December 2020)

Following the publication of the Report in the Public Interest (RIPI) by the Council's external auditor, which highlighted significant issues relating to the Council's finance and governance processes, an action plan was developed to address these findings. The Committee had the opportunity to review this action plan at its meeting on 8 December 2021.

In reviewing the action plan the Committee made 25 recommendations relating to the actions contained in the report, including requests for additional training for Members on various aspects of the Council's budget and the approach to risk. The Committee also recognised that greater clarity was needed to define the role of both Scrutiny and Audit.

Overall the Committee concluded that the action plan was a robust piece of work, especially when considering the time frame available for its preparation. Although the ambition displayed in the action plan was commendable, it was recommended that a system of prioritisation be used to ensure the plan could be delivered within the capacity constraints on the Council.

Strategic Review of Companies – Action Plan (21 December 2020)

In addition to the action plan for the RIPI, the Committee also had the opportunity to review an action plan created to address issues raised by a Strategic Review of the Council's Companies undertaken by PwC.

From this review, the Committee concluded that a lack of governance and appropriate management systems was a reoccurring theme in both the Strategic Review and the RIPI. In total the Committee made 24 recommendations on the action plan, most notably that achieving value for money should be the guiding principle in any future relationship with the Council's companies.

On a similar theme the Committee welcomed the confirmation that a 'fire sale' of Council assets to raise funds was not planned. The Committee recommended that any future disposal of assets needed to be informed by a detailed assessment of the asset to ensure best value for money was obtained.

Call-In: Emission Based Parking Charges (7 January 2021)

At its meeting on 7 January 2021 the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reviewed a call-in request made on a key decision to introduce emission based parking charges.

Although the Committee in principle supported the introduction of emission-based parking charges, there was significant concern about the potential impact it would have upon the local economy in district centres across the borough. As it was concluded there was not enough evidence to determine whether there was sufficient mitigation available to offset the introduction of the new charges, the Committee concluded that it would refer the decision to the Cabinet for reconsideration. The ground for making this referral asked that further consideration be given to retaining the free parking bays, which would have been lost under the original decision.

When the decision was reconsidered by the Cabinet, it was agreed that the existing free parking bays would be retained in district centres for the foreseeable future.

Budget 2021-22 (16 February 2021)

In a change to the usual approach to budget scrutiny, prior to the Committee meeting on 16 February 2021, the three Scrutiny Sub-Committees met to review the budget proposals for the areas covered under their respective remits. The conclusions from these meetings were then fed into the discussion of the Committee on 16 February.

From the reassurance provided by the Leader, Cabinet Members and officers at the meeting, the Committee was hopeful that robust financial control systems would be put in place to help with the delivery of 2021-22 budget. However, given that similar assurance had been given in previous years, which in hindsight had been optimistic at best, there remained serious concerns that could only be allayed through the actual delivery of the budget.

In particular, there was concern about the deliverability of the Adults and Children's Social Care budgets, especially as the savings targeted a reduction in the number

adults and children in the care system. To ensure there was not an adverse impact upon care receivers, it was agreed that both the budget and performance of these services would be regularly monitored by their respective Scrutiny Sub-Committees in the year ahead.

The Committee recognised that there may be unintended consequences arising as a result of any savings and agreed that further thought needed to be given on how this would be picked up through the corporate monitoring process. It was also agreed that the potential impact upon the workload of staff would need to be closely monitored corporately.

Call-In: Crystal Palace & South Norwood Low Traffic Neighbourhood (23 March 2021)

At its meeting on 23 March 2021 the Scrutiny & Overview Committee reviewed a call-in request that had been submitted on the key decision to implement an experimental Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme in Crystal Palace and South Norwood. To inform their consideration of this item, the Committee received representations from the London Borough of Bromley and local community groups both for and against the scheme.

At the meeting the Committee questioned the Cabinet Member and officers extensively on the reasons for introducing the scheme, and queried whether there was sufficient evidence to demonstrate the environmental benefits of low traffic neighbourhood schemes. However, the Committee acknowledged that a benefit of using an experimental scheme was that it would allow the Council to gather data to indicate whether it had been effective or not.

Having considered the representations made at the meeting, along with the answers provided to their questions, the Committee concluded that it had a number of concerns about the delivery of the experimental scheme that needed further consideration before it commenced. As such, it was agreed that the decision would be referred to Cabinet for reconsideration to address concerns relating to areas such as the base evidence to be used, the success criteria for the scheme, mitigation available in the event of a negative impact on surrounding areas and consultation and engagement with stakeholders. This referral is due to be considered by Cabinet in June 2021.

Scrutiny Improvement Review (30 March 2021)

At its meeting on 30 March 2021 the Scrutiny & Overview Committee was presented with a report from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CFGs) outlining the findings from their review of scrutiny in Croydon. The review had initially been commissioned by the Scrutiny & Overview Committee in March 2020 and had been due to complete in the autumn of 2020. However, when the RIPI was published by the Council's external auditor in October 2020, completion of the review was delayed to ensure that account could be taken of the concerns raised about scrutiny in the RIPI and other reviews conducted as a result of the RIPI.

When considering the report the Committee commended its quality and agreed that the findings had highlighted their own areas of concern, with issues such as access to information being longstanding concerns for scrutiny members. The report set out thirteen recommended areas for improvement, which the Committee accepted and agreed would be used as a basis for an improvement programme going forward. The initial priorities for the improvement programme were identified as ensuring scrutiny could play an immediate role in the financial recovery of the Council, ensuring scrutiny was provided with the right information to undertake its role successfully and ensuring there was a proper process in place to coordinate the scrutiny work programme.

It was confirmed that CFGS would continue to work with the Council on the delivery of the recommendations arising from the Scrutiny Improvement Review. The Committee welcomed the continued support of CFGS, along with confirmation that the support would be provided without cost to the Council. It was agreed that a follow-up report would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee on 15 June 2021 to provide more information on the delivery of the recommendations.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Sub-Committee scrutinises key issues affecting children and young people in the borough as well as the services provided by the Council and its partners. It has the power to scrutinise the functions of the Council as a Local Education Authority and examine the Dedicated Schools Grant on a yearly basis.

You can view the agendas, reports and minutes of this Sub-Committee by clicking on the link: www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings

Membership



**Cllr
Robert
Ward (C)**



**Cllr Sean
Fitzsimons
(VC)**



**Cllr Jamie
Audsley**



**Cllr Sue
Bennett**



**Cllr Jerry
Fitzpatrick**



**Cllr
Bernadette
Khan**



**Cllr Helen
Pollard**



**Cllr
Louisa
Woodley**

**Josephine
Copeland**

Teacher
Rep

**Elaine
Jones**

Catholic
Diocesan
Rep

**Leo
Morrell**

Diocesan
Rep

**Paul
O'Donnell**

Parent
Governor
Rep

Children & Young People Sub-Committee Work Programme 2020-21

The 2020-21 work programme of the Sub-Committee was primarily focussed on the Children's improvement journey following the re-inspection of the service by Ofsted in February 2020. As a result of the covid-19 pandemic, the work programme had to be amended to ensure that children and young people were safeguarded throughout the unprecedented times facing the borough and country.

Focus in the latter part of the municipal year turned to the Children's budget, due to the Council's financial position, with the impact of savings upon the service and recovery proposals scrutinised in detail. Through the work of the Sub-Committee, recommendations were made on a range of items that were critical to the lives of young people in Croydon.

What follows below is a short summary of the highlights from the year, but for those who are interested to find out more, full sets of agendas and minutes for each meeting can be found on the Council's website at the following link [Children & Young People Sub-Committee – Agendas & Minutes](#)

Emotional Well Being and Mental Health Service

At its meeting on 23 June 2020 a report was received from voluntary services as well as the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) on the services they provided and changes made to delivery as a result of the covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee learnt that in the voluntary sector, face to face contact had been suspended during lockdown, although following reconfiguration, many aspects of these services had been able to continue using online means of access. Both staff and young people had adapted well to this new approach, which meant that resources could be appropriately distributed. As a result of these changes, there had been more contact with parents, young people and their guardians. SLaM had continued face to face interactions where necessary for high risk, crisis and inpatient services.

The dedication and commitment of the staff providing these services during the pandemic was commended. It was also recognised that the use of technology to find innovative ways to increase accessibility to services was a benefit that had arisen from the pandemic.

Childrens Improvement Plan Update

The Sub-Committee was presented with the revised Children's Improvement Plan following the Ofsted standard inspecting local authority children's services (ILACS) inspection of Early Help and Children's Social Care where the service had been given a judgement of 'Good'. The improvement made since the last inspection in 2017 was noted and the hard work and dedication of the leadership and staff was commended.

The Sub-Committee agreed that it must continue to hold the executive to account, to maintain line of sight over service delivery and provide robust challenge whenever necessary to ensure that high levels of performance continued to be maintained.

Children's Services Response to Covid 19

Following lockdown in March 2020, the Sub-Committee had its first opportunity to receive detailed information on the Council's response and support for vulnerable children.

The Sub-Committee commended the innovative and collaborative response by children's services, schools, community and voluntary groups in supporting the young people and families in the Borough.

Members and officers were united in their concern over the potential disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable sections of the community. The Sub-Committee was clear that officers needed to have explored in detail how to ensure appropriate support would be provided to children who had experienced neglect in advance of school reopening in September 2020.

Children's Social Care and Education Dashboards

Throughout the municipal year, the Sub-Committee received the performance dashboards it had requested following the revision of the Children's Improvement Plan 2021. This allowed the Sub-Committee to have continued oversight of performance of the service and provided the ability to spot any emerging trends for further investigation.

The data provided in these dashboards continued to be refined over the year, in response to concerns that there was a lack of consistency in the way that information was provided. It was agreed that the programme director would design the dashboard to be more streamlined, in order to minimise the level of resources required to produce similar dashboards for different purposes.

From the outset the Chair of the Sub-Committee had requested a set of diagnostic indicators be presented at each meeting to enable Members to identify areas for further scrutiny which would shape future work programming.

It was also agreed that it was important to have access to benchmarking tools such as LG Inform to enable comparison and analysis of performance data in local regional and national context.

Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report

At its meeting of 3 November 2020 the Sub-Committee received the annual report from the Safeguarding Children's Board, with the Chairs of the Board in attendance as well as representatives from the partnership. However there was disappointment that there was no representation from the Police, who made up one third of the partnership.

The Sub-Committee raised concern about the level of antenatal and health visits in the borough, which were significantly lower than the rest of London, and had been an area of concern for a number of years. Members were not satisfied that rapid action was being taken to address the issues involved and it was agreed that a report specifically focussed on this issue would be brought before the Sub-Committee to discuss the points raised, with reassurance sought that action was being taken to make radical improvements to the service.

The Sub-Committee challenged the effectiveness of the partnership, in particular in fulfilling its function to support neglected children, as it was evidenced that their

targets had only been partially met. There was also reference made to the lack of evidence to demonstrate there had been adequate communication with and an understanding of the experience of children in disability groups. As a result, it was requested that further detail be provided on what actions were being taken to address these outcomes.

Blended Learning Overview

The Sub-Committee had the opportunity to scrutinise the blended learning process and were joined by a panel of school head teachers who were able to provide insight on how the process was being managed in individual schools and the different provision across the borough.

It was agreed that this item be brought to the Sub-Committee for further discussion following the meeting of 15 September 2020, where an update on the reopening of schools was provided. At that meeting there had been concerns raised on what the recovery curriculum would look like in different schools and the development of blended learning plans

Members were keen to learn about the different methods adopted by schools to ensure that learning continued to be delivered for children and young people despite the current climate.

The Sub-Committee was reassured by the innovative use of resources and by the dedication and tireless effort of staff working within schools as well as the education directorate to provide learning to pupils. The innovative use of technology was commended and the data on the level of engagement was positive and reassuring.

Challenges and barriers experienced by schools were reviewed and included the provision of devices for virtual learning and strengthening parental skills, knowledge and ability to support their children's learning. The Sub-Committee identified the inequality of the attainment gap as a direct result of the pandemic as a key concern and recommended work to explore different ways of close the gap should be made a priority.

Service Impact and Response to Budget Reduction

As a result of the S114 notice and the Council's savings plans to balance its budget, it was decided that a report would be brought to each meeting on the budget for Children's Services from January 2021.

The Sub-Committee questioned whether the Council's spending would be reduced to a statutory minimum, but reassurance was given that the proposals do not require services to be reduced to this level. However, the proposals detailed what action would have to be taken in the event that the Council received a minimum statutory offer from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government.

The Sub-Committee agreed it was essential that any savings proposals were not only based on service delivery, but that voices of services users continued to be central to provision.

Additional reassurance was sought on the preparation of detailed alternative plans in the event of more extensive cuts. Of particular concern was the potential impact a reduction in Early Help provision may have on schools. It was recommended that the Executive Leadership Team give careful consideration to the risks arising should approval not be given to the capitalisation direction.

There was also concern about the retention of core skills during any reconfiguration of services in light of the ongoing challenges. This was especially concerning given the historic difficulties experienced with recruitment and retention of good quality staff.

Education Budget

The Sub-Committee received the annual report on the Education Budget, which detailed an overall national schools funding increase for 2021/22 and 2022/23. There was also an increase to the Dedicated Schools Grant allocation but the High Needs Overspend remained an area of priority and was still being addressed.

The Sub-Committee had concern about the deficit created through the closure of two schools in the borough which would fall on the General Fund. Members were not reassured about the Council's ability to close the gap on the deficit and agreed to continue to maintain a watching brief on this issue.

Higher Education Journey of Croydon Residents

For the first time, the Sub-Committee received a detailed report with data that had been collected and confirmed by officers over a number of years on the higher education journey of Croydon residents as well as the whole of London.

The Sub-Committee agreed that the information provided in the report was beneficial due to the comparative data included as well as inequalities it highlighted. It was agreed that the report contained valuable information on achievements and educational choices of young people in the Borough which would be useful to draw out possible subjects for further scrutiny in future work programmes.

Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee Annual Report

The Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee scrutinises the work of local healthcare organisations and social care services provided to adult residents of the borough. It also, in conjunction with neighbouring local authorities, investigates and responds to emerging health and social care issues and changes affecting more than one borough.

You can view the agendas, reports and minutes of this Sub-Committee by clicking on the link: www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings

Members of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee



**Cllr Sean
Fitzsimons(C)**



**Cllr Andy
Stranack
(VC) until
Nov 20**



**Cllr
Richard
Chatterjee
(VC) from
Nov 20**



**Cllr Pat
Clouder**



**Cllr Jerry
Fitzpatrick**



**Cllr Steve
Hollands
from Nov
20**



**Cllr
Andrew
Pelling**



**Cllr Scott
Roche
until Nov
20**



**Gordon
Kay
Healthwatch
Co-optee**

Health & Social Care Sub-Committee Work Programme

As would be expected in a year of global disruption caused by the covid-19 pandemic, the work of the Health & Social Care Sub-Committee has primarily focussed on the response provided locally to the pandemic. In the first half of the year the Sub-Committee paid close attention to the initial emergency response to the pandemic. The focus has changed since the New Year, with scrutiny of the vaccination programme and the recovery of services taking precedence.

Given the budgetary pressure being experienced by the Council, the other main focus for the Sub-Committee was the budget for Adult Social Care services, with reports received at a number of meetings providing an update on the current budget position and the development of savings proposals for 2021-22. It has been agreed

that regular scrutiny of the Adult Social Care budget will continue to be a primary focus for the Sub-Committee in 2021-22, in order to ensure that the proposed budget remains on track for delivery.

Apart from scrutinising the response to covid-19 and the Council's budget challenges, the other main item scrutinised by the Sub-Committee was the opportunity to review the draft Autism Strategy before it was considered by the Cabinet.

What follows below is a short summary of these highlights from the year, but for those who are interested to find out more, full sets of agendas and minutes for each meeting can be found on the Council's website at the following link [Health & Social Care Sub-Committee – Agendas and Minutes](#)

Covid-19: Pandemic Response & Vaccination Programme

Throughout the year the Sub-Committee has received updates at each of its meetings on the ongoing response in the borough to the covid-19 pandemic. During this time, the Sub-Committee continued to be highly impressed by the commitment of staff in the NHS, Social Care and Public Health who had continued to provide vital services, despite the often difficult circumstances and challenges created by the pandemic

Although it was recognised that services in Croydon had performed well during the pandemic, especially in regards to managing the spread of covid-19 in care settings, the Sub-Committee continued to raise concerns when these were identified. These included the lack of pace in expanding testing capacity in the borough, although it was recognised that this was outside the control of the Council. The Sub-Committee repeatedly emphasised the need for an increasing granularity of data on areas such as testing to help coordinate the pandemic response.

The Sub-Committee also had concerns about how the pandemic was impacting upon care packages and sought reassurance that measures were in place to safeguard individuals who accepted reduced care packages. Reassurance was given that people had only been contacted about the possibility of reducing care packages as a contingency measure and in actual fact only a small number of people had needed to reduce their care, with any reduction carefully managed with families.

The Sub-Committee agreed that it was important to learn lessons from the delivery of the pandemic response and has suggested that areas such as the shielding system and hospital discharges should be reviewed to identify possible improvements that can be used in the event of further waves of the pandemic.

Covid-19: Vaccination Programme

Following approval for the roll out of vaccinations to the general public in late 2020, the focus of the Sub-Committee turned to the local vaccination programme. In the early stages, it was clear that the success of the programme would be determined by

the availability of vaccine supplies. Thankfully the availability of the vaccines has improved as the programme has progressed.

A key concern of the Sub-Committee, that it continues to monitor, was vaccine hesitancy and engagement with harder to reach groups. The Sub-Committee was reassured that work was ongoing both locally and nationally to understand the reason for vaccine hesitancy. It was agreed that the Sub-Committee would keep a watching brief on the vaccination programme to gain reassurance that the work to engage with hard to reach groups was having the desired impact.

The Sub-Committee commended the work to vaccinate care homes as a priority and agreed that the management of infection in that environment had been excellent.

Adult Social Care Budget

In light of the ongoing financial challenges facing the Council, the Sub-Committee had a number of updates provided throughout the year on the Adult Social Care budget. It was recognised that there was a number of big challenges in delivering a balanced budget for Adult Social Care, which was likely to have the biggest impact for those in receipt of care in the 18-65 age groups.

From its review of the budget setting process, the Sub-Committee welcomed the use of comparative data to design a realistic savings programme. However, given there was a history of not achieving budgets, its deliverability would need to be tested and monitored throughout the forthcoming year. As part of this, it was agreed that a deep dive on commissioning would be included in the work programme for 2021-22.

Although it was concluded the savings programme presented to the Sub-Committee seemed to address the budget deficit and identified further savings, it was also agreed that it was difficult to make any definitive judgement on the likelihood of it being delivered. If the budget was going to be delivered, it was essential that a robust system of ongoing monitoring was put in place to provide greater budgetary control. Monitoring was also essential to understand the impact on residents from the changes to prevent creating further issues in the future.

Autism Strategy

At its meeting on 9 March the Sub-Committee had the opportunity to review the draft Autism Strategy prior to its consideration by the Cabinet. To help inform the discussion on this item members of the Autism Partnership Board were invited to the meeting to share their own experiences of autism services in the borough.

From the discussion at the meeting, the Sub-Committee welcomed the broad commitment from both the Council and its partners to the Autism Partnership Board and the creation of the Autism Strategy. The Sub-Committee suggested that the Board should consider engaging with Healthwatch Croydon to inform its work going forward. It also supported the need to improve data collection around autism.

The Sub-Committee commended the work that had been undertaken to deliver the strategy and agreed that it would be useful to be updated on progress made with delivery at a future meeting.

Streets, Environment and Homes Scrutiny Sub-Committee Annual Report 2019/20

The Streets, Environment and Homes Scrutiny Sub-Committee has a broad remit. It investigates services and issues relating to housing, public and private transport, Croydon's highways, waste management and environmental issues. In all its work, the Sub-Committee seeks to promote sustainability and to promote the health and wellbeing of Croydon's residents.

You can view the agendas, reports and minutes of this Sub-Committee by clicking on the link: www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings

Membership



**Cllr Leila
Ben
Hassel (C)**



**Cllr
Richard
Chatterjee
(VC) until
Nov 20**



**Cllr Jeet
Bains (VC)
appt Nov
20**



**Cllr Jamie
Audsley**



**Cllr Luke
Clancy**



**Cllr
Stephen
Mann**



**Cllr Vidhi
Mohan**



**Cllr
Caragh
Skipper**

Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee Work Programme 2019-20

The Sub-Committee identified key work streams on the Climate Commission, the 'Planning for the Future' White Paper and the Local Plan Review. As a result of the Council's financial position, the latter part of the municipal year concentrated on the budget for the Place Service, including the potential service impact of any savings and recovery proposals. The work of the Sub-Committee has resulted in a range of recommendations made on a range of important topics.

What follows below is a short summary of the highlights from the year, but for those who are interested to find out more, full sets of agendas and minutes for each meeting can be found on the Council's website at the following link [Streets, Environment & Homes Sub-Committee – Agendas & Minutes](#)

Croydon Climate Crisis Commission

To aid the Sub-Committee in its consideration of this item, the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members and representatives from the Citizen's Assembly were invited to participate in the meeting. A key line of inquiry for the Sub-Committee was the pace of progressing the Commission, which was felt to be lacking since declaration of the emergency took place in 2019. There was an acknowledgement that there had been a lack of pace due to a number of different factors, not least the covid-19 pandemic which had severely impacted the services both locally and nationally.

It was agreed that as the climate crisis was such an important issue, that political leadership should be shared by all Cabinet Members. The importance of stakeholders, community groups and residents in delivering the intended outcome of the being Carbon Neutral by 2030 could not be underestimated. The Sub-Committee welcomed confirmation that the Council remained committed to engagement with both the public and stakeholders despite difficulties presented by the covid-19 pandemic and steps were being taken to finalise a robust engagement plan informed by activities of the Commission.

Alongside the engagement and action plans, there were various activities taking place to maximise the use of local expertise, with ideas welcomed on how best to harness the potential of local action groups to contribute towards delivering work streams and projects as a way of counteracting financial pressures and alleviating the lack of resources.

Although there was criticism of the pace of activity, it was acknowledged that there has been a number of positive outcomes experienced as a direct result of the pandemic such as the opportunity to introduce a Low Traffic Neighbourhood scheme and further proposed changes to the transport network to support pedestrians and cyclists. It was agreed that a collective case needed to be made to both the Mayor of London and Central Government for increased investment in the green economy and jobs.

'Planning for the Future' White Paper

The Sub-Committee received a report detailing the key elements of the White Paper published by the Government on 6 August 2020. The Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to discuss the implications of this paper upon the planning system in the borough, with the feedback given being used to inform the Council's response to the consultation.

One concern arising was the possibility that some of the ideas set out in the White Paper may not work as well in London boroughs as they may in other parts of the country. As such, the Sub-Committee agreed that it was important to present the case for Croydon and London, in order to allow consideration to be given to the implications of the new planning arrangements in the absence of London specific details in the proposals.

The challenge of producing, streamlining and implementing design codes to cover the whole borough was highlighted, in particular their restrictive nature and the lack of fluidity that they may present. The Sub-Committee welcomed the move to produce detailed guidance, as it would help ensure developers met good practice and adhered to strict guidelines.

The Sub-Committee also welcomed the proposed protection offered for parks and open spaces due to the importance of these spaces within local infrastructure, and to the community wellbeing of the borough and its residents. It was agreed that Councillors should be lobbying for greater protection of nature and natural spaces across the borough and country.

Staff Changes, Service Impact and Response to Budget Reductions

The meeting of 2 February 2021 was attended by a large proportion of the Cabinet due to the Place Budget cutting across several portfolios.

The Place department was commended for having meeting its budget in recent years. In order to deliver targeted savings proposals going forward, it would require tighter budgetary control, frequent reviews of team structures and routine reviews of risk to ensure that any investment was having the intended impact. Although the proposals would have some impact upon staff, the focus would be on maximising income from external clients.

The Sub-Committee discussed its concerns about the deliverability of the savings proposed, which mainly arose from a lack of confidence on both an individual and organisational level due to previous experience which indicated there was cultural resistance to change. Reassurance was given that the track record of the Place department demonstrated that previous savings had been delivered and would continue to build on this reputation, with confidence placed in senior staff to deliver the savings required.

The Sub-Committee was reassured by the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration that the Libraries consultation would be brought before scrutiny for discussion and that consideration would be given to the views of residents. Further reassurance was given that any ideas brought forward on community ownership or other models of operation that would be cost effective and/or cost neutral to the Council would be given careful consideration and supported where appropriate.

The Sub-Committee raised concern that some services such as Highways provided a reactive rather than preventative service, which officers acknowledged, advising that the service was being reviewed with different operating models being assessed for the potential benefits they could deliver.

Officers were confident that the proposals and savings identified would not reduce vital resources and policies in key statutory service areas and it was agreed that it was important for the department to continue monitoring all areas through its risk management processes, holding officers to account as needed.

Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy

At its meeting of 16 March 2021, the Sub-Committee received a report detailing the background to the management of Section 106 and CIL, what income had been received and how this income had been allocated.

In order to ensure maintenance of the meaningful proportion of CIL, the Council's Infrastructure Finance Group had been established to manage and oversee the process for accessing funding for projects

The Sub-Committee discussed the approach used for the allocation of funds and it was agreed that there was a lack of engagement and participation in the process, which needed to be reviewed to create a process that better engaged community groups and residents in decision making. It was also suggested that consideration be given to Member representation on the Community Fund Panel to further inform decision making on the allocation of community funds.

Croydon Local Plan Review

The meeting of the 16 March 2021 also included an extensive discussion on the Review of the Local Plan which was taking place in response to issues such as the housing crisis, declaration of the Climate Emergency in July 2019, the new London Plan 2021 and the need to align with the National Planning Policy Framework. The Strategy would consider growth, jobs, services, maximisation of current infrastructure and sustainable development.

The Sub-Committee highlighted the need for the Local Plan to be underpinned by a core principle of extensive engagement with key stakeholders, including local communities. It was also recommended that the review process should take account of ideas and feedback gathered from various events and consultations, as well as learning from best practice at other Local Authorities.

The importance of meeting sustainability objectives was discussed and it was agreed that the policy needed to be more specific on the adoption of emerging trends which could be beneficial for the future of the Borough.