COMMUNITY SERVICES AND SAFETY SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 1 November 2011 at 6.30pm

WRITTEN MINUTES – PART A

Present: Councillor Jason Cummings (Chair)
          Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Deputy Chair)
          And Councillors: Bernadette Khan, Tony Pearson, Donald Speakman and
          Mike Selva

A40/11 MINUTES (Agenda item 1)

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2011 be
          signed as a correct record.

It was noted that the working partnership with the London Borough of Lambeth
referred to in the minutes had since come to an end.

A41/11 APOLOGIES (Agenda item 2)

No apologies were provided.

A42/11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Agenda item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

A43/11 URGENT BUSINESS (Agenda item 4)

There were no items of urgent business.

A44/11 EXEMPT ITEMS (Agenda item 5)

There were none.

A45/11 FLOOD PREVENTION (Agenda item 6)

The following officers were in attendance for this item:
- Stephen McDonald (Executive Director of Planning and Environment)
- Steve Iles (Head of Highways)
- Rory Macleod (Head of Development Management)

Officers were asked whether any outside consultants had been brought in to
draw up the borough's flood prevention strategy. Members were advised that
the "Drain London" report which informed the Scrutiny report had been
drawn up by experts from all over London to achieve a consistent approach
across the capital.

Referring to paragraph 7.1 of the report, Members highlighted the need to
clean gullies and soakaways in the south of the borough. They also observed
that the gully cleaning regime should reflect seasonal requirements rather
than be carried out at regular intervals regardless of need. Officers explained that various service teams would be brought together following a corporate review, allowing improved co-ordination between their various functions and better harmonised cleaning schedules. Gully cleaning will also be linked to road resurfacing works.

Members reported regular flooding in the vicinity of the Tesco supermarket in Purley due to blocked gullies by the supermarket. However, it was noted that the A22 and A23, which run along two sides of the store, were the responsibility of Transport for London (TfL), not Croydon Council. Officers undertook to take up flooding issues in the area with TfL and to involve enforcement officers to ensure the issue was resolved.

Members noted that, according to the regime set out in paragraph 9.2, it would take seven years to clear all soakaways. They asked whether the provision described was sufficient for the needs of the borough and whether officers were aware of areas in greatest need. Officers confirmed that hotspots were being prioritised, and explained that their strategy involved striking a balance between local need and resources available to address it, using local knowledge and a clear strategy to mitigate risk as far as funding and other resources would allow.

Members asked whether flood risks in the vicinity of the Wandle were taken into account when building new housing developments. They were informed that officers liaised with the Environment Agency to process any planning application for a development in the proximity of this river. One approach to mitigating flood risks in such areas recommended by the Environment Agency is to raise the level of buildings above the level of possible flood waters.

Officers were asked whether flood risks were being kept under review in the light of evolving climactic conditions. They were advised that while the Croydon Plan had identified flood risk areas in the borough, the Core Strategy provided more up-to-date information on this type of risk, which represents a material consideration to be taken into account when evaluating planning applications. Members were also advised that planning officers also intended to produce a Development Plan Document (DPD) in coming years to provide developers with more advice on flood prevention.

Members questioned officers on the right of residents to concrete over their front gardens. They were reminded of the recent change in legislation affecting residents’ rights in this regard. Since 2008, planning permission has been required to put down a non-porous, impermeable hard-standing. A leaflet explaining the issues has been produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Environment Agency.

In answer to a question, officers explained that the legislation had been used in the borough. However, the number of applications had been low and the Act had not had a significant impact on the local environment. Officers added that any residents flouting this legislation would be liable to enforcement action if their action comes to the notice of planning officers.

Members questioned officers regarding regulations governing dropped kerbs. They were informed that these were subject to highways regulations, since a key consideration in granting permission was road safety. In addition, Members heard that the installation of dropped kerbs was not authorised within one metre of a street tree.
Members observed that bringing a range of services together had been accompanied by a reduction in the workforce. Officers were asked how many staff had been lost. Members were given assurances that the alignment of services should not impact on quality. However, members raised the prospect of reduced staff numbers having to tackle unforeseen situations such as serious flash floods, and asked whether the council would still have sufficient resources to bring the situation under control speedily. Officers explained that the council had put business continuity systems in place to deal with emergencies, and had a mechanism within the drainage contract to bring in additional staff to deal with any emerging crises.

Members asked officers to e-mail them information on current staff numbers.

Members highlighted problems arising from lengthy delays in repairing burst water pipes and in completing Victorian water mains replacements. Officers concurred that these had led to serious traffic congestion, particularly in the north of the borough. Officers explained that the council now had stronger powers to control the length of works carried out by the utilities under the Traffic Management Act 2004. In addition, officers advised Members that the council held quarterly liaison meetings with all utilities to reduce disruption from road works to a minimum.

Members commended the work being carried out to reduce flood risks in Croydon and thanked officers for attending the meeting.

A46/11 Implications of the Police and Social Responsibility Act for London
(Agency item 7)

Councillor Jason Cummings gave a brief update on the implications of the Act for London boroughs. He explained that the Metropolitan Police Authority was to be abolished and replaced by the Mayor’s Office of Policing and Crime (MOPC) in early 2012.

The Sub-Committee requested a short follow-up briefing on the MOPC and its work.

A47/11 Committee Members' role in shaping the content of Scrutiny reports
(Agency item 8)

Councillor Jason Cummings encouraged the sub-committee to suggest questions to be addressed in future reports to the sub-committee. He reminded the sub-committee that any of its Members could contact him and Vice-Chair Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury to put forward such suggestions, but also urged members to take advantage of this agenda item to shape the content of the next meeting's reports.

The sub-committee consequently made the following suggestions.
Croydon's Family Justice Centre
The report for this agenda item should highlight work done thus far between the new Borough Commander and the FJC

The Equalities Act and Equality Impact Assessments
The report should include information on
- Costs of EqIAs to the Council
- Costs of not carrying out EqIAs

The Voluntary Sector and Croydon's Commissioning Framework
The report should include answers to the following questions:
- What success stories have emerged from the new system?
- Insights into the impact for local organisations and into the quality of commissioning
- What is the Council getting from the new commissioning arrangements?
- What impact has the on smaller organisations and the BME community?

A48/11

2011-2012 WORK PROGRAMME REPORT (Agenda Item 9)
The sub-committee agreed the work programme for 2011-2012 with the following amendments:

RESOLVED that:

- That officers be consulted on the possibility of rescheduling the agenda item on "arts in Croydon", postponed from the 1 November meeting, to the 31 January 2012 meeting

- That additional information be sought on the future of the libraries service, particularly,
  - the key elements of future service and changes to current provision
  - further answers to queries raised at the 13 September sub-committee meeting

- That no task and finish group be convened on the library services in line with Scrutiny Chairmen's advice, in view of the current Scrutiny work programme and difficulties in fitting in with the timetable for awarding the future libraries service

PART B

None

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm