

CROYDON COUNCIL

MINUTES

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD ON

**Monday, 2nd December 2013 at 9.15pm in the
Council Chamber, Town Hall.**

THE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR YVETTE HOPLEY - PRESIDING.

Councillors Arram, Avis, Ayres, Bains, Bashford, Bass, Bee, Bonner, Butler, Buttinger, Chatterjee, Chowdhury, Clouder, Collins, Cromie, Cummings, Fisher, Fitze, Fitzsimons, Flemming, Gatland, George-Hilley, Godfrey, Gray, Hale, Hall, Harris, Hay-Justice, Hoar, Hollands, Jewitt, Kabir, Kellett, B Khan, S Khan, Kyeremeh, Lawlor, Lenton, Letts, Mansell, Marshall, D Mead, M Mead, Mohan, Neal, Newman, O'Connell, Osland, Parker, Pearson, Perry, H Pollard, T Pollard, Quadir, Rajendran, G Ryan, P Ryan, Selva, Scott, Shahul-Hameed, Smith, Speakman, Thomas, Watson, Wentworth, Winborn, Woodley and Wright.

Absent: Councillor Slipper

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (agenda item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Avril Slipper.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (agenda item 2)

All Members of the Council confirmed that their interests as listed in their Annual Declaration of Interests Forms were accurate and up-to-date.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL (agenda item 3)

The Extraordinary Council Meeting had been requisitioned to debate a motion proposed by Councillor Tony Newman and seconded by Councillor Simon Hall, who reserved his right to speak.

The wording of the requisition was as follows:

'Councillor Fisher and his administration has a track record of political mismanagement of the Council's finances and contracts, demonstrating a lack of understanding of risks, a lack of competence and a failure to stand up for this Borough, as well as a lack of transparency. This has had a huge direct impact on Council finances and the people of this Borough.

Just in the last few weeks, we have seen examples such as: (i) multi-million pound losses crystallising on Davis House; (ii) admission of a cost of over £140 million on the HQ, when previously claimed to be at no cost, not to mention other costs and commitment relating to CCURV emerging whilst the core logic of CCURV has never delivered; (iii) allowing the Library Service to go into the hands of a different company from the one negotiated with, where the new company has not been evaluated as to probity, financial solidity or track record and where staff face their second change of ultimate employer in a matter of weeks; (iv) sale of valuable China in breach of the Council's own rules and on the basis that the Council could not fund capital commitments otherwise; (v) large long-term contracts being entered into without full consideration of the risks or proper discussion in the relevant committees.

This Council unreservedly condemns this administration's mismanagement, which shows that it is not fit to run this Council and has not run the Council in the interests of the citizens of the Borough'.

Councillor Newman opened the debate saying he stand tonight more in sorrow than anger, the people of Croydon are tired of yarboo politics, tired of being told by dictate that the Town Hall knows best and want an honest debate and answers to the challenges on their pressured family budgets, their communities and town. Cllr Newman then detailed what the Conservatives had inherited in 2006, a balanced budget, a council tax increase of 4.4%, balances increasing; the audit commission had rated the Council as 3 star for value for money. He went on to detail some of the projects that had been delivered during the Labour administration including the New Addington CALAT centre, Thornton Heath Sport Centre, Ashburton School, the Decent Homes Programme, supporting the Warehouse Theatre and Clock Tower and starting to roll out the street lighting programme. He spoke of the upcoming elections and the challenges Labour would face if elected, these include the urgent need for investment in New Addington and the Fairfield Halls. In

summing up Cllr Newman said that Croydon “deserved better” and when Labour are elected in May 2014 they would work with the police to reduce crime, devolve decisions to communities wherever possible, open the council books to all, webcast Council meetings and restore democracy to Croydon.

Councillor Tim Pollard in opposing the motion spoke of Labours financial mismanagement “of epic proportions” of the Council during their 12 years in office; this included a rise in real terms of Council Tax of 107% whilst the current Conservative administration had decreased Council Tax in real terms by 0.7%. Cllr Pollard went on to speak about the library contract saying that the only thing to change was the shareholder and everything else would remain the same which will enable huge saving for the Council. The Riesco sale had raised more than anticipated and made a substantial contribution towards refurbishment of Fairfield Hall. Whilst Labour may sound very committed to the Fairfield Halls he reminded the Chamber that this (Labour) was the party that cut their funding to nothing. He asked how else would Labour fund the refurbishment other than by borrowing at huge cost to the Council. In summing up Cllr Pollard said that government was about making tough decisions something he believes the party opposite were incapable of making.

Councillor Godfrey speaking for the motion said that it goes to the heart of the failure of the current administration over the last 8 years; an obsession in building the new HQ when refurbishment of Taberner House would have cost less without the adverse effect on front line services. Funds could have been diverted to refurbish Fairfield Halls rather than building the new HQ. On the sale of some of the Riesco collection, Cllr Godfrey stated that the Council had failed to meet its financial target by £9 million and should not be saying it was a success. In selling the collection the reputation of the town had been damaged and broke the bonds of trust. He went on to speak about the library contract and possible job losses. Should Labour be successful in May they would end the privatisation of libraries and develop them as valued parts of the council. In summing up Cllr Godfrey said that the Labour Party would seek to rebuild trust and respect amongst staff, with external bodies like the Arts Council and Museum Association. This town need change and that will be delivered in May as the Labour Group were ambitious for Croydon.

Councillor O’Connell in speaking against the motion said that this was his opportunity to compare and contrast the two administrations. Council Tax was doubled when Labour were in administration, rises of 35% in 1995 and 27% in 2003 were made. He asked ‘what did they do with the money?’ They wasted it on various projects and run down the reserves. Since 2006 when the Conservatives were elected, Croydon has flourished, Council Tax rises have been kept to a minimum, done in a period of growing demand, an ageing population and in a climate of public spending cuts. Cllr O’Connell detailed further comparisons, over the previous 8 years, £100 million of savings have been made, and on target to deliver a further £16million next year whilst still delivering top services. In summing up Cllr O’Connell also detailed the comparison in Council Tax rises average 2.1% to average 9% for Labour, Council Tax collection rates 96% to 93%, 68% of pupils achieving 5 or more

GCSEs A-C grade against 43%, 100% Decent Homes Standard against 83%, 44% domestic waste being recycled rates compared to 13% and a third fewer people in temporary accommodation. Over £1billion pounds of investment over 7 years compared to £7million. Cllr O'Connell urged all councillors to vote against the motion and called Labours record "mismanagement in time of plenty".

Councillor Hall in seconding the motion spoke of the Administrations secrecy, incompetence, arrogance and flawed priorities. The last three years have seen the Tory led government make cuts to local government which have compounded the Administration's mismanagement. Cllr Hall went on to speak about the spending on CCURV, £150million on the HQ, £13million on Davis House stating that CCURV has delivered nothing expect debt. What capital projects could have been delivered instead, a swimming pool in New Addington, new community centres where needed, all without having to sell part of the Riesco collection. He said that contracts or contract awards had been mismanaged.

Councillor Fisher in speaking against the motion said that the opposition were trying to divert attention away from their track record when they were in power compared to the record of the current administration. Cllr Fisher went on to compare some of the key points. Investment in the town of £1.5billion from Westfield/Hammerson compared to schemes bought forward by Labour i.e. Park Place, Arrowcroft, schemes that went nowhere. Cllr Fisher said "We deliver real regeneration, real jobs for local people, real prosperity". The previous Labour administration had increased Council Tax by 107% over 12 years. When the Conservatives were elected in 2006 they inherited no reserves, these have now been restored, GCSE A* -C rates up every year, real improvement for our young people, failing schools tackled, recycling rates more than doubled and at the same time delivered quality services across the borough. In summing up (against a background of noise and heckling) Councillor Fisher said "the future prosperity of the borough is safe in Conservatives hand, 16500 new jobs, 9500 new homes, additional funding for investment, improved school education".

The motion was put to the vote and was **lost**.

4. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting ended at 21:50.