

MINUTES

**COUNCIL TAX MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD ON
Monday 27 February 2017 at 6:30 p.m. in Council
Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street,
Croydon, CR0 1NX**

Present: Councillor H Ali, Councillor J Audsley, Councillor J Avis, Councillor J Bains, Councillor S Bashford, Councillor K Bee, Councillor S Bennett, Councillor M Bird, Councillor C Bonner, Councillor S Brew, Councillor A Butler, Councillor J Buttinger, Councillor R Canning, Councillor R Chatterjee, Councillor S Chowdhury, Councillor L Clancy, Councillor P Clouder, Councillor S Collins, Councillor M Creatura, Councillor J Cummings, Councillor S Fitzsimons, Councillor A Flemming, Councillor M Gatland, Councillor T Godfrey, Councillor L Hale, Councillor S Hall, Councillor P Hay-Justice, Councillor M Henson, Councillor S Hollands, Councillor Y Hopley, Councillor K Jewitt, Councillor H Kabir, Councillor B Khan, Councillor S King, Councillor M Kyeremeh, Councillor T Letts, Councillor O Lewis, Councillor S Mann, Councillor M Mansell, Councillor D Mead, Councillor M Mead, Councillor V Mohan, Councillor M Neal, Councillor T Newman, Councillor S O'Connell, Councillor A Pelling, Councillor J Perry, Councillor H Pollard, Councillor T Pollard, Councillor J Prince, Councillor B Quadir, Councillor A Rendle, Councillor P Ryan, Councillor P Scott, Councillor M Selva, Councillor M Shahul-Hameed, Councillor D Speakman, Councillor A Stranack, Councillor P Thomas, Councillor J Thompson, Councillor W Trakas-Lawlor, Councillor M Watson, Councillor J Wentworth, Councillor S Winborn, Councillor D Wood, Councillor L Woodley, Councillor C Wright, Councillor C Young

MINUTES - PART A

A1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Scott, Thompson and Bains.

A2 MINUTES

Council **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 30 January 2017 be approved as a correct record of that meeting.

A3 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

Councillor Kyeremeh declared under s106 Local Government Finance Act 1992 that he would not vote on any of the recommendations related to Council Tax.

A4 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

A5 ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor began the item by announcing the news that Michael Hewlett had sadly passed away at the age of 81. The Mayor detailed Michael's extensive community activism in the field of housing which included the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel, Housing's All Ages Group, the London Tenants' Federation Committee as well as the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH) residents' board. Michael had also found time to play an active role in his local church committee that planned and developed the Longheath Community Centre. The Mayor stated that Michael would be greatly missed by officers, Councillors, fellow tenant representatives and his local community.

In addition, the Mayor announced the sad news that, in the early hours of the day prior to Council, Roger Burg had passed away. The Mayor stated that Roger had been a campaigner for LGBTQ rights in Croydon and across the world. Alongside the Mayor, he had led the first Pride march in Croydon for 20 years in August of 2016.

The Council held a minute's silence in memory of both Michael and Roger.

The Mayor announced that he would be holding a Gala Dinner on 21 April 2017, sponsored by Radnor Properties. The Mayor was also holding a Golf Day on 29 March 2017 and thanked the car dealership Lexus for their sponsorship of the event.

A6 COUNCIL TAX DEBATE

The Leader moved the recommendations contained in the business report (attached at agenda item 8). The Leader stated that the budget delivered for Croydon whilst protecting front-line services. It provided certainty for families and the administration had done everything in its power to ensure the elderly and vulnerable were protected. The social care precept would be implemented to ensure the elderly could live in dignity and the Leader stated that if the opposition Members had compassion they would support the budget and send a message to central Government that bargaining with

local authorities was wrong.

The Leader stated that Croydon Labour had the vision for an ambitious manifesto and was delivering on the commitments made. With the fractured political climate, that included Brexit, local politics mattered and could make a difference to people's lives. The administration had brought the budget under control and was delivering on key projects, such as the new community centre in New Addington, the new Fairfield Halls and College Green development, that the Leader stated had been shamefully opposed at Planning Committee by the Conservative Members.

The Leader listed some of the key achievements by the administration:

- The Council had become a London Living Wage employer,
- Affordable housing was being delivered
- Standards in the private rental sector were being improved through the landlord licensing scheme
- The borough's streets were cleaner and safer
- The Council was working with the Mayor of Croydon on many key pan-London issues

The budget was referred to as "the Croydon Deal"; the Council was working in partnership with local people on a number of developments including the Tech Hub and the growth in the cultural and artistic scene in the borough. This work would turn Croydon into a 21st century global city; a city of culture, music and creativity. Large employers were moving to the borough such as Body Shop and the Civil Service, which, the Leader claimed, was in stark contrast to when the Conservative administration was in power and Nestle vacated their headquarters in Croydon.

The Leader announced that in the next eighteen months the Civil Service would be bringing 6,000 jobs to Croydon. Over the next 12 months plans would be set in place to make Croydon the greenest and most sustainable borough through schemes such as the expansion of cycle highways and working with the Mayor of London on air quality in the capital.

Under Croydon Labour, the Leader stated, true devolution of power would be delivered to local residents through schemes such as the community Ward budgets. This was in comparison to the Conservatives who wanted to reduce the number of Councillors in Croydon.

The Leader stated he was proud to move the budget which provided economic competence, value for money and the protection of front line services. This was in comparison to the previous Conservative administration that had cut every service yet built a new Council office for themselves. The Leader stated that under Labour this would never happen again.

Councillor Butler seconded the motion and reserved her right to

speak.

Councillor Tim Pollard stated that the proposed tax rises were the highest increase in London and the highest rate the borough had ever set. The proposed budget delivered the highest debt the borough had ever undertaken and the biggest departmental overspend. Councillor Pollard stated that the Labour administration had lost control of the budget, with particular reference to the People department overspend. The Leader had attempted to blame it all on central government and contrary to what the Leader had stated there had been no evidence of “sweetheart” deals by central government. Residents did not fall for Labour’s accusations, as had been seen in the Copeland by-election. The Leader had failed to mention where Croydon benefited from central government – such as through the National Schools Fund.

Councillor Pollard stated that the proposed budget was about “spin” to deflect from the high levels of debt, which was out of control. Half a million pounds had been apportioned to Brick by Brick yet no information on a business plan had been brought to Cabinet the previous week. Croydon needed more housing but not at any cost.

In addition, Councillor Pollard stated that Labour was not listening to residents. An example was the Fairfield Halls development in which the Council claimed it could not afford a phased development to keep it open, yet the proposed budget included £4m from central government. Other examples were provided such as the garden waste collection service, the local plan, the Purley skyscraper and 20mph speed limit zones.

Councillor Pollard stated Labour had failed to deliver, such as fly tipping where Conservative Councillors visited every Ward and found significant fly-tipping. The new contract for cleaning services was cheaper, but only because the Council had gifted the contractor new machinery.

Councillor Pollard stated that the administration was failing to keep the Adult Social Care budget under control. He claimed that Labour talked competence but only delivered more debt and that the proposed tax rises were the tax-payer bailing out Labour once again.

Councillor Butler stated that the proposed budget was about aspiration. Due to the context of central government cuts it was the best budget possible. The budget put frontline services and residents first with schemes such as the new Fairfield Halls development, public art and culture, new public realm and street lighting, and large employers moving to Croydon. The budget would ensure that no one was left behind by the new changes in the borough, through education, homes and jobs.

Education would be promoted through new schools being built and upgrades of current schools across the borough. A new campus would be built in the heart of Croydon; a purpose built development

to reflect the changes in education.

Brick by Brick would ensure that modern homes were built across the borough with good designs and were truly affordable. In the private rental sector, the Council would ensure homes were safe and of good quality through the landlord licensing scheme. The Gateway service was also ensuring that homelessness was prevented by targeting those hardest hit by the central government cuts.

Finally, jobs were being created through the new tech city and local pop-up shops and enterprises supported by the Council. Croydon is a certified London Living Wage borough and the Council's job brokerage scheme ensured that residents would benefit from Croydon's significant growth.

Croydon needed a Council fighting for their residents, and this proposed budget was on the side of residents.

Councillor Hale stated that there was a housing crisis that effected hundreds of families in Croydon. There were a significant number of families in bed and breakfast or temporary accommodation and the average wait time for a family-sized Council property was five years. Labour had stated in their manifesto that they would build new Council homes yet three years later none had been started or completed. This situation was due to the administration's mismanagement with the dismantling of the Housing Department. The previous Conservative administration had delivered 105 new homes and planned more but this had been stopped when the Labour administration came to power in 2014. Instead the Council were putting significant money into Brick by Brick, which Councillor Hale claimed was secretive and little information of its activities were available. There was no publicly available information on debt repayment priorities or corporate risk management.

Councillor Collins stated that the proposed budget was positive and ambitious and would get things done. Councillor Collins claimed that central government was cutting grants to local authorities in an unfair manner, as was exposed recently at Surrey County Council. Despite this, the administration refused to be a victim and would act optimistically with projects such as the significant investment in street cleaning equipment and vehicles. Savings made through the increased efficiency by this machinery would be invested back into the service and a better contract for street cleaning would come into effect in 2018.

Despite such achievements, Councillor Collins claimed, the opposition party displayed nothing but negativity through social media channels such as Twitter, and falsely claimed that the administration did not listen, despite the numerous street commission and resident meetings attended. An example was the Purley Oaks depot that had been overcrowded due to neighbouring Surrey County Council closing their centres in the vicinity. Councillor Collins stated that he had listened to residents' concerns and now a significantly better service was in place which residents were very

pleased with.

Councillor Helen Pollard stated that the Fairfield Halls development had already fallen behind schedule with the opening date moved from July 2018 to November 2018. In addition, the development was dependent on the property market which Councillor Pollard considered a significant risk and that it would be taxpayers' money that would be relied on if it failed. The administration had claimed that a phased development could not be afforded and yet there was £5m in the proposed budget for a new gallery at Fairfield Halls. Councillor Pollard stated that spending was spiralling out of control and the Fairfield Halls development could make the situation worse. It was stated that there had been no public participation in the development; residents had been ignored and there was a risk that the new operator would not provide for community use of the new site.

Councillor Woodley stated that adult social care was facing a national funding crisis. Central government had stated that the funding would be met by the precept but this would not meet the full income required in Croydon. There had been an £8m growth that needed to be met, despite the administration transforming social care to ensure the elderly and vulnerable could live with dignity and independence. The Gateway team at the Council were doing an excellent job of keeping people in their homes despite the extreme welfare reforms from central government. Councillor Woodley gave examples of Croydon residents who had had their disability benefits re-assessed and refused despite significant ailments. Councillor Woodley stated that policy makers in central government should visit these residents in Croydon to witness the impact of the welfare reforms to Croydon residents.

Councillor Perry stated that the budget was out of control and that taxes were being imposed in order for the administration to spend. It was stated that in this context the significant overspend in the People department was of no surprise. By contrast, there was no overspend on the regeneration sections of the budget due, Councillor Perry claimed, to the borough's regeneration grinding to a halt. It was stated that the administration had failed to deliver on regeneration projects aside from ones delivered by the previous administration. The Fairfield Halls development was an example where the project was behind schedule, would provide low standard housing and required money from Coast to Capital to keep the scheme going. There had been considerable changes to the regeneration team and it appeared that the Council did not even hold leverage over Westfield Hammerson to ensure that major project was delivered on time. Councillor Perry stated that where money was being spent, it was ineffective. Examples were given such as Surrey Street and Box Park, the latter of which, it was claimed, was not a London Living Wage employer and was causing local businesses to close down.

Councillor Henson stated that despite the huge budget cuts the borough had faced, the administration had brought the budget under

control and delivered significant achievements across the borough. The Councillor's own ward of Ashburton was proffered as an example where a new child development centre had been opened and the work undertaken on the old library building which was due to open in July 2017 and would become a community hub for the ward. The Ward budgets scheme had also brought good programmes to the Ward such as art projects and money mentoring sessions. Despite the central government cuts, significant estate upgrades had taken place in areas of the borough that the previous administration had neglected. Frontline services were being maintained despite the austerity measures and the tax increase was being kept below inflation.

Councillor Hopley stated that a Labour administration meant tax rises and out of control budgets. It was claimed that the Cabinet Member for Families, Health and Social Care had failed to keep control of the People department budget as evidenced by the large overspend. In addition, a committee with Councillor Hall had been set up to look at the overspend issue yet its activities had taken place behind closed doors and in any event, the People department overspend had since doubled. Councillor Hopley made comments questioning whether Councillor Hall was a qualified accountant.

Councillor Hall made a point of order for a personal explanation related to Councillor Hopley's comments. Councillor Hall stated that he was a chartered accountant and that Councillor Hopley's comments were an insult that should not be heard in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Hopley withdrew her comment, and continued that officers in the People department had been working very hard but were being diverted instead to the creation of a report in which no information was available.

Councillor Wentworth stated that the proposed budget delivered for the people of Croydon and was a significant achievement by Councillor Hall and the officers involved. The budget was remarkable, Councillor Wentworth claimed, given the financial problems that had been left behind by the Conservative administration that had previously been described as "gloom and bust". It was stated that the previous administration had left Croydon as the fly-tip capital of London, however under the new administration prosecutions and fines for fly-tipping were at a record high. It was stated that the previous administration had tried to sell off and close the borough's libraries, neglected the district centres and parks, and yet spent huge sums on the new Council offices. Councillor Wentworth claimed that the previous Conservative Leader of the Council had stated to the press that there was a £100m black hole in the Council's funds.

This budget would keep promises made by the administration such as clean streets, new homes, cultural life investments, and to keep Upper Norwood library open.

Councillor Cummings stated that the Labour leadership was refusing to take responsibility for their actions and was instead blaming everyone else. The strategy for Croydon appeared to be to increase debt and increase tax and the budget was spiralling out of control. It was stated that the majority of Councils in London had not put up Council Tax to the limit like the administration was proposing for Croydon. Councillor Cummings stated that Council Tax was being raised to cover for the administration's failures and thus residents were losing out. Councillor Cummings listed the London boroughs that had not increased Council Tax by the same level as was proposed for Croydon. The Councillor stated that "Corbynomics" was being practised in Croydon by the administration and it had failed.

Councillor Hall paid tribute to Finance officers for the work undertaken on the budget. It was stated that the context could not be more difficult: with an inherited £100m black hole in the Council's finances and significant cuts in funding from central government. In addition there were huge additional pressures on Council services due to the welfare reforms, reduction in public health funding and national lack of housing. Councillor Hall stated that the administration had put the Council's finances on a solid footing by utilising the Council's assets and embracing modern technology to drive efficiency. The Council had promoted a joined up approach in the People Department in areas such as the Gateway service and adult care transformation. Investment was being made in housing and the growth zone, in new schools, the Fairfield Halls development and the New Addington community centre.

Councillor Hall claimed that the opposition had no alternative budget and would reverse the good measures that had been made. The administration had shown its commitment to devolution through the introduction of Ward budgets and it was announced that these budgets would be doubled in the coming year. It was stated that three years ago the Council was in financial crisis. Since that time the Labour administration had weathered the central government cuts and brought the budget under control.

At the conclusion of the debate the Chief Executive explained that the votes on the Council Tax and Adult Social Care precept would be taken via a poll vote as required by legislation. The remaining recommendations contained in the business report would be conducted via an ordinary vote.

Recommendation 1.1(I): A 1.99% increase in the Council Tax for Croydon Services

The recommendation was put to a poll vote:

Members who voted in favour: Councillor H Ali, Councillor J Audsley, Councillor J Avis, Councillor K Bee, Councillor C Bonner, Councillor A Butler, Councillor R Canning, Councillor S Chowdhury, Councillor P Clouder, Councillor S Collins, Councillor S Fitzsimons, Councillor A Flemming, Councillor T Godfrey, Councillor S Hall, Councillor P Hay-Justice, Councillor M Henson, Councillor K Jewitt, Councillor H Kabir, Councillor B Khan, Councillor S King, Councillor T Letts, Councillor O Lewis, Councillor S Mann, Councillor M Mansell, Councillor T Newman, Councillor A Pelling, Councillor J Prince, Councillor A Rendle, Councillor P Ryan, Councillor P Scott, Councillor M Selva, Councillor M Shahul-Hameed, Councillor W Trakas-Lawlor, Councillor M Watson, Councillor J Wentworth, Councillor D Wood, Councillor L Woodley, Councillor C Young.

Members who voted against: Councillor J Bains, Councillor S Bashford, Councillor S Bennett, Councillor M Bird, Councillor S Brew, Councillor J Buttinger, Councillor R Chatterjee, Councillor L Clancy, Councillor M Creatura, Councillor J Cummings, Councillor M Gatland, Councillor L Hale, Councillor S Hollands, Councillor Y Hopley, Councillor D Mead, Councillor M Mead, Councillor V Mohan, Councillor M Neal, Councillor S O'Connell, Councillor J Perry, Councillor H Pollard, Councillor T Pollard, Councillor B Quadir, Councillor D Speakman, Councillor A Stranack, Councillor P Thomas, Councillor S Winborn, Councillor C Wright.

The recommendation was carried: 38 Yes; 28 No; Abstain - 0

Recommendation 1.1(II): A 3% increase in the Adult Social Care precept (a charge Central Government has assumed all Councils will levy in its spending power calculations).

The recommendation was put to a poll vote:

Members who voted in favour: Councillor H Ali, Councillor J Audsley, Councillor J Avis, Councillor K Bee, Councillor C Bonner, Councillor A Butler, Councillor R Canning, Councillor S Chowdhury, Councillor P Clouder, Councillor S Collins, Councillor S Fitzsimons, Councillor A Flemming, Councillor T Godfrey, Councillor S Hall, Councillor P Hay-Justice, Councillor M Henson, Councillor K Jewitt, Councillor H Kabir, Councillor B Khan, Councillor S King, Councillor T Letts, Councillor O Lewis, Councillor S Mann, Councillor M Mansell, Councillor T Newman, Councillor A Pelling, Councillor J Prince, Councillor A Rendle, Councillor P Ryan, Councillor P Scott, Councillor M Selva, Councillor M Shahul-Hameed, Councillor W Trakas-Lawlor,

Councillor M Watson, Councillor J Wentworth, Councillor D Wood, Councillor L Woodley, Councillor C Young.

Members who voted against: Councillor J Bains, Councillor S Bashford, Councillor S Bennett, Councillor M Bird, Councillor S Brew, Councillor J Buttinger, Councillor R Chatterjee, Councillor L Clancy, Councillor M Creatura, Councillor J Cummings, Councillor M Gatland, Councillor L Hale, Councillor S Hollands, Councillor Y Hopley, Councillor D Mead, Councillor M Mead, Councillor V Mohan, Councillor M Neal, Councillor S O'Connell, Councillor J Perry, Councillor H Pollard, Councillor T Pollard, Councillor B Quadir, Councillor D Speakman, Councillor A Stranack, Councillor P Thomas, Councillor S Winborn, Councillor C Wright.

The recommendation was carried: 38 Yes; 28 No; Abstain - 0

The remaining recommendations as contained in the business report:

1.1:

III. Note the GLA increase of 1.5% (the increase is solely associated with the Police budget).

With reference to the principles for 2017/18 determined by the Secretary of State under Section 52ZC (1) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) confirm that in accordance with s.52ZB (1) the Council Tax and GLA precept referred to above are not excessive in terms of the most recently issued principles and as such to note that no referendum is required. This is detailed further in section 5.4 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20).

IV. The calculation of budget requirement and council tax as set out in Appendix D and E of the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20). Including the GLA increase this will result in a total increase of 4.3% in the overall council tax bill for Croydon.

V. The three year revenue budget assumptions as detailed in the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20) and the associated appendices:-

- Appendix A The programme of revenue savings and growth by department for 2017/20.

- Appendix B The Council's detailed budget book for 2017/18.

VI. The Capital Programme as set out in section 12, table 22 and 23 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20).

VII. The continuation of the Council's existing Council Tax Support Scheme in 2017/18 as detailed in section 10.4 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20).

VIII. The adoption of the Pay Policy statement at Appendix H of the report (Cabinet Report 6.1: General Fund & HRA Budget 2017/20).

1.2 Council notes that Cabinet was requested to agree:

I. A rent decrease for all Council tenants for 2017/18, in line with the

Government's social rent policy which has legislated to reduce social rents by 1%.

II. Garage and Parking space rents will increase by 2 % per week.

III. The service charges for caretaking, grounds maintenance and bulk refuse collection will increase by 2% per week as detailed in section 11

2. Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy 2017/18

2. Cabinet recommends Council to approve:

2.1 The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2017/2018 as set out in the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement & Annual Investment Strategy 2017/18) including the recommendations that:

2.1.1. The Council takes up the balance of its 2016/2017 borrowing requirement and future years' borrowing requirements, as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement).

2.1.2. That for the reasons detailed in paragraph 3.11 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement), opportunities for debt rescheduling are reviewed throughout the year by the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer and that, he be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Treasury and in conjunction with the Council's independent treasury advisers, to undertake such rescheduling only if revenue savings or additional cost avoidance can be achieved at minimal risk in line with organisational considerations and with regard to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) as set out in the Council's Finance Strategy 2016-2020.

2.1.3 That delegated authority be given to the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Treasury, to make any necessary decisions to protect the Council's financial position in light of market changes or investment risk exposure.

2.2 The Annual Investment Strategy as set out in paragraph 3.14 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement).

2.3 That the Authorised Borrowing Limits (required by Section 3 of the Local Government Act 2003) as set out in paragraph 3.7 of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement) and as detailed in the associated Appendix C be as follows:

2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
£1,234.442m	£1,365.442m	£1,372.442m

The Prudential Indicators as set out in the associated Appendix C of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement).

2.4 The Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement (required by SI 2008/414) as set out in Appendix D of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement).

2.5 The Council's authorised counterparty lending list as at 31st December 2016 as set out in Appendix E of the report (Cabinet Report 6.2: Treasury Management Strategy Statement) and the rating criteria set for inclusion onto this list.

The recommendations were put to the vote and carried.

A7

SCRUTINY BUSINESS REPORT

Councillor Fitzsimons stated that the key role of scrutiny was to hold the administration to account and to give residents a voice. The lessons that had been learnt through the budget scrutiny meetings were that austerity was still having a detrimental effect which was unlikely to subside until the early 2020s. Many Croydon residents were getting poorer, significantly due to central government's welfare reforms but also due to the increases in the private rental sector housing rates. There was a need to renew the Council's services and identify savings every year. It was also concluded that the precept alone would not meet the funding need for adult social care. Councillor Fitzsimons stated that he was proud that the administration was putting educational needs first by increasing school places in the borough.

Councillor Cummings asked how much of the scrutiny work programme had been focussed on Croydon.

Councillor Fitzsimons responded that it was important to consider local issues in the broader picture of services such as national budgetary pressures on schools and hospitals.

Councillor Creatura asked what was the biggest weakness in the current administration.

Councillor Fitzsimons responded that scrutiny played a part in the administration, primarily through holding the executive to account. The biggest weakness was the lack of active scrutiny participation by Members of the opposition.

Council **NOTED** the Scrutiny Business Report.

**BUSINESS REPORT OF THE LEADER AND CABINET
INCORPORATING QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER AND CABINET**

The item began with announcements and questions to the Leader.

The Leader stated that he had not heard the Conservatives comment on the announcement that 6,000 new jobs would be coming to Croydon in the coming year. It was stated that under the Labour administration businesses were coming to Croydon, as compared to the previous administration where thousands of jobs were lost.

- Councillor Tim Pollard asked whether the administration had stopped over spending on budgets. The Leader responded that the opposition had sat in silence while its national party had significantly reduced funding for Croydon and as such was not standing up for the residents of Croydon. Central government was encouraging local authorities to raise the precept to the maximum allowed. The opposition was talking about overspends while old people were suffering due to the national crisis in social care.
- Councillor Tim Pollard asked a supplementary question stating that Labour had overspent on budgets every year, so how would people believe that they would fix it this year. The Leader responded that central government budget projections were based on an assumption of the Council Tax and precept rises being implemented to the maximum permissible level; this was described as a con by the Conservative party to make residents pay for what should be a nationally funded matter. The Leader claimed that the opposition failed to understand the position that elderly and vulnerable residents in Croydon were in.
- Councillor Audsley asked what front line services would be put at risk by a Conservative administration. The Leader responded that nothing would be safe. An example was given of the recent Planning Committee, where the Conservative MP Gavin Barwell had spoken in favour of the Fairfield Halls development but the Conservative party Members on the Committee had voted against it. The decisions the opposition had shied away from, when collated together, would have required an additional £30m of cuts to services. Labour were making tough decisions but continued to defend front line services and protect the elderly and the vulnerable.
- Councillor Bennett asked why there had been a cut to funding for the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) support group. The Leader responded that the question was not factually accurate and queried why Councillors who had, in his opinion, voted for

cuts were now speaking against cuts.

- Councillor Bennett asked a supplementary question on whether the administration understood the danger of FGM to young people in the borough. The Leader passed the matter to Councillor Ali to clarify the funding issue. Councillor Ali stated that Croydon was leading the way in the UK with regard to combatting FGM. The FBI and CIA had recently met with the Metropolitan police regarding the advanced work undertaken on combatting FGM and Croydon were the only authority invited to the meeting. The Council co-funded the officer post that leads on FGM, filling the funding void previously met by the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The Council had also sourced additional funding for the FGM work including the support group. Therefore the premise of the question was rejected.
- Councillor Chowdhury asked a question on how the administration had been able to protect front line services despite the financial black hole left by the previous administration and central government cuts. The leader responded by paying tribute to the officers and Councillor Hall who had worked on the budget. Labour had taken the tough decisions and every one of those decisions had been opposed by the Conservatives; it was those decisions that had ensured that front line services would be protected. By taking the tough decisions, the administration would deliver for Croydon's residents.
- Councillor Creatura asked whether there were plans to raise Council Tax higher in the future. The Leader responded that the votes that had been taken illustrated an intent to fund and protect local services. However a national solution was needed for social care, which was a national crisis. The Leader expressed support for the Mayor of London's funding of the Metropolitan police and the extra officers that would be provided for Croydon. By contrast, the Leader stated, the Conservatives had voted against care for the elderly and extra police officers.
- Councillor Creatura asked a supplementary question on whether the administration would raise Council tax beyond the current cap if it could. The Leader stated that he would not, and that the funding should come from central government.
- Councillor Pelling asked a question on the proposed Council Tax rates being lower in real terms than six years of the last eight years of the previous Conservative administration. The

Leader responded that in real terms the Conservatives had cost Croydon more than the Labour administration. In other London boroughs there had been a cross-party approach to the Council Tax process however the Leader stated that the Croydon Conservatives had just voted against everything and to cut everything.

- Councillor Thomas asked why the Council Tax had been set higher than in other London boroughs. The Leader responded that the rate set had been in line with most other Councils across the country. There had been an unprecedented attack on Croydon's funding by central government and the Leader stated that the opposition had not spoken out in defence of Croydon.

The Mayor then moved the item into the first pool of Cabinet Members.

Councillor Ali announced that additional funding had been secured for refuge services and a community post for domestic violence.

- Councillor Hale asked how many new Council homes had been completed in the four years up to May 2018. Councillor Butler responded that Councillor Hale had stated that one of the key reasons for homelessness was the central government reforms. Councillor Mead had called for a review of the Council's new build scheme under the previous administration and it was concluded that it was not the best way to deliver new homes in the borough. Brick by Brick was now on course to build one thousand new homes across the borough including key sites such as the Fairfield Halls development and at the Taberner House site.
- Councillor Hale asked a supplementary question on whether this meant that no new Council houses had been built in Croydon. Councillor Butler responded that Brick by Brick would bring one thousand new homes, half of which would be affordable and would be introducing a local letting scheme for local people.
- Councillor Rendle asked whether it was only a Labour administration that could deliver on big development projects in the borough. Councillor Butler responded that the Fairfield Halls development was an example where the administration had actioned a large-scale project that the opposition had failed to deliver on when in power. Another example was the

swimming pool complex in New Addington.

- Councillor Winborn asked whether Surrey Street traders could trust the Council after what was described as a poor consultation process on new changes. Councillor Watson responded that it had not been a flawed consultation, and that traders had been consulted all along the way. Examples were given of traders requesting increased footfall, flattening of the surface, and the welcoming of the art work that had appeared in the street. There was also plans for new signage both in the market itself and in key areas in the town centre.
- Councillor Winborn asked a supplementary question on how confident the Cabinet Member was that the new investment would create modern facilities and increase footfall to the market. Councillor Watson responded that the investment would create better public realm and signage, whilst attracting new traders as well as retaining the existing ones. Investment was critical to the long-term survival of the market.
- Councillor Kabir asked what new big development was planned in the borough, after the Planning Committee had recently approved the Fairfield Halls development. Councillor Butler responded that the Fairfield scheme was the biggest regeneration project that Croydon had ever seen and included a new college, art gallery and thousands of homes. New schemes were due to come forward soon and Council would be updated as the plans progressed.
- Councillor Bennett asked whether the Coulsdon Community Centre would be considered for refurbishment since a new centre would not be viable. Councillor Butler responded that the administration had listened to local residents and therefore a new building would not come forward as a Brick by Brick project but there was the possibility of new schemes in the near future.
- Councillor Lewis asked whether the Cabinet Member welcomed the Mayor of London's proposed investment in front line police officers for the city. Councillor Ali responded that the choice between Labour and Conservative was a choice between investment verses underinvestment. The Metropolitan Police had lost a third of its budget from central government but intervention by Labour was bringing investment into community policing. The outgoing police commissioner had raised concerns about this lack of funding. The funds made available by the Mayor of London were welcomed, as was the new focus on community policing.

- Councillor Lewis asked a supplementary question regarding whether the Conservatives, by voting against the London precept allocated for police funding, were gambling with the safety of residents in Croydon. Councillor Ali responded that the Mayor of London had called on politicians of all parties to unite against the central government cuts to policing.
- Councillor Neal asked which Council housing properties had been identified for investment in improvements and keeping the condition of the properties to a high standard. Councillor Butler responded that there was cross-party agreement on the need to keep the Council's housing stock to a good standard. Some of the buildings were poorly designed and caused issues such as criminality. However, central government had made it harder to undertake renovations through the housing revenue account. The administration was committed to keeping 100% of the Council's housing stock to a good standard.
- Councillor Neal asked a supplementary question on when improvement works would be undertaken. Councillor Butler responded that the housing stock met the decent homes standard and Brick by Brick would be bringing forward new schemes to improve the Council's estate
- Councillor Rendle asked what resources had been identified for investment in local district centres. Councillor Watson responded that all the borough's district centres must benefit from the unprecedented growth in Croydon's economy. Free one hour parking was a key issue businesses in district centres had asked for and this had been implemented. Companies would be requested to implement the London Living Wage in district centres. Councillor Watson stated that the business rate revaluation was an attack on local small businesses, and the Labour administration was on the side of small businesses. The Croydon Small Business Commission would visit and speak with small businesses to see what more could be done to support them in the borough.
- Councillor Rendle asked a supplementary question pertaining to the recent disability conference at the reverse jobs fayre and whether the Cabinet Member would continue to support that work. Councillor Watson responded that he had made the business case for equality and that there should be no barriers for the best people to get employment. It was stated that to be the best employers, companies had to ensure everyone had an opportunity.

- Councillor Perry asked why the administration had failed to deliver on any regeneration schemes of its own, and instead overseen delays in many developments such as Taberner House. Councillor Butler responded that in some cases the delays had been due to central government, in other cases it had been due to problems that had been inherited by the previous administration such as inadequate provision of affordable housing. The administration would ensure that a better deal is secured for Croydon residents.
- Councillor Perry asked a supplementary question pertaining to stalled developments that could have delivered homes for residents who were instead being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Councillor Butler responded that the opposition had opposed every development for housing that had been brought forward by the administration and the claims made by the opposition that requesting more affordable housing would drive developers away had been proven to be false.
- Councillor Chowdhury asked whether Croydon would benefit from the £50m that the Mayor of London had earmarked to support schemes for accommodation for young people. Councillor Butler stated that the Mayor of London was committed to the city's young people and Croydon had excellent officers in the Council who were ensuring the borough benefitted from the funds made available.
- Councillor Helen Pollard asked whether Surrey Street Market was being gentrified. Councillor Watson responded that the market was not being gentrified and that without investment the market would not survive in the long term. Local traders were being consulted and they were asking for more investment, an increase in footfall and an improved public realm. The changes were benefitting the traders.
- Councillor Helen Pollard asked a supplementary question regarding the owners of Exchange Square who did not want the temporary relocation of traders on the land and whether there was an alternative location available. Councillor Watson responded that he had been in conversation with the owners of Exchange Square and that they had indicated that they would be willing to temporarily host the market there. The traders had stated a preference to not move to that site however, so alternative sites were being considered. Phased work was possible but would take a longer time to complete and accrue additional cost. Conversations were ongoing with

traders so that an appropriate location could be found.

- Councillor Avis asked a question regarding the Norwood-based group “Reaching Higher”. Councillor Watson responded that the organisation was fantastic and received funding grants from the Council. The professionalism and the extent of work being done on such small budgets was a particular feature.

At this stage of the item the Mayor moved to the second pool of Cabinet Members.

Councillor Collins announced that he had attended a busy Streets Commission residents’ meeting in north Croydon. Those present had welcomed the improvements in street cleaning in the area and credit was given to the staff’s attitude. The Keep Britain Tidy organisation were also present and were looking to work with Croydon on some new initiatives on behavioural change.

Councillor Hall announced that most Councils in the UK had increased their Council Tax in line with Croydon, and that this included the Conservative-run London borough of Kingston. The lowest-funded inner-London borough Council, Wandsworth, still received £30m more funding than Croydon, and Councillor Hall stated that it was a failure of the opposition to address this in the eight years they were in power. It was also stated that the overspend figures that were being used by the opposition were inaccurate.

- Councillor Mohan asked if the Cabinet Member was proud of what was described as the largest ever increase of Council Tax, and the highest level of debt, that Croydon had seen. Councillor Hall responded that he believed that it was right to deliver for the residents of Croydon.
- Councillor Mohan asked a supplementary question on whether the Cabinet Member was denying the Croydon had the highest Council Tax increase in London and the highest ever rate of Council Tax in Croydon. Councillor Hall responded that eight local authorities in London had increased their Council Tax in line with Croydon. It was stated that the purpose for the increase was to deliver services to residents due to what was described as the disastrous funding settlement for Croydon from central government.
- Councillor Prince asked what was the process to remind residents when they were in arrears on Council Tax before legal action was undertaken. Councillor Hall responded that

he would provide a detailed response in writing to the question but reassured the Councillor that officers were regularly reviewing the process. Councillor Hall also paid tribute to officers in the Gateway service who were preventing residents from falling into arrears in the first place.

- Councillor Hollands asked a question related to the alleged secrecy of Brick by Brick which, it was claimed, lacked transparency and was involved in asset stripping the Council. Councillor Hall responded that he considered the accusations outrageous and that not a single Council asset had been transferred. Any asset transfers would be signed off by an Executive Director and the Councillor himself, and would be reported to the subsequent Cabinet meeting in detail. It was also stated that Brick by Brick was a properly registered company and a paper detailing its governance had been submitted to a recent Cabinet meeting.
- Councillor Hollands asked a supplementary question regarding what was alleged to be the asset stripping from the previous Labour administration in the early 2000s. Councillor Hall responded that the Conservative administration had sold off the Council's Riesco collection. Under the current administration, it was stated, there would only be asset transference when a financial case had been agreed by the Council. It was not about selling off assets but making the most of the assets the Council owned, such as relocating staff from Jeannette Wallace House and leasing the upper floors of Bernard Weatherill House.
- Councillor Canning asked how many residents had benefitted from the Gateway service. Councillor Hall responded that the figure was in the thousands and updated numbers would be brought to the next Cabinet meeting. A Parliamentary Select Committee had visited the service and praised its work.
- Councillor Canning asked a supplementary questions regarding the rise in residents in arrears on their rents due to welfare cuts, and what the Gateway service could support residents in this position. Councillor Hall responded that all channels would be used to ensure residents were aware of the Gateway service and what help was on offer for residents struggling.
- Councillor Cummings asked a question regarding an article written by Councillor Hall in 2014 which criticised the previous administration's borrowing. Councillor Hall responded that the article criticised the level of debt in relation to what it was

being used for. The debt under the current administration was in relation to investment in the borough which would create new income streams for the Council. It was stated that the borrowing under the previous administration went on projects such as £140m for the new Council offices.

- Councillor Cummings asked a supplementary question regarding whether the article was hypocritical. Councillor Hall responded that the article criticised borrowing for what was referred to as a luxury headquarters for the Council. The matter at issue was the purpose of the debt, not simply the debt itself.
- Councillor Lewis asked how a Conservative budget would affect the current investment into New Addington. Councillor Hall responded that there would be no new community centre and services for the elderly and vulnerable would not be provided. There was also outreach work being undertaken by the Council to families affected by benefit cuts, and it was claimed these would be under threat as well.
- Councillor Lewis asked a supplementary question pertaining to what was alleged to be the neglect of New Addington by the previous Conservative administration. Councillor Hall responded that, under a Conservative administration, New Addington would not have benefitted from the ward budgets that had been introduced to provide for grassroots community initiatives.
- Councillor Bashford asked why there was a £5million contingency fund for the Fairfield Halls development but not for other capital projects. Councillor Hall responded that most capital projects did contain a contingency budget and in the case of the Fairfield Halls development the contingency had been set aside due to the complexity of the project.
- Councillor Bashford asked a supplementary question on whether a full tendering process would be undertaken for the proposed gallery in the development. Councillor Hall responded that the administration believed in openness and transparency and that a written response on the tendering process would be provided.
- Councillor Audsley asked what action the Council could take to tackle air pollution in the borough, with reference to the Mayor of London's recent introduction of a pollution charge on heavily-polluting vehicles. Councillor King responded that he

welcomed the Mayor of London's initiative and supported the ultra-low emissions zone due to be introduced in early 2019. A range of efforts were being made by the Council to increase the borough's air quality, much of which had been detailed in a recent report that went to a scrutiny committee.

- Councillor Creatura asked whether the People department overspend had been reduced since the committee had been set up to overview the department's budget. Councillor Hall responded that the governance board set up would look at immediate and long terms plans to manage the huge pressures on the service.
- Councillor Creatura asked a supplementary question on whether the overspend had reduced or increased. Councillor Hall responded that an overspend was forecast.
- Councillor Hay-Justice asked for an update on road safety measures enacted in the Addiscombe Ward. Councillor King responded that a productive meeting had been held with the Robert Fitzroy School and new measures were being introduced around the area such as extended road markings, 20mph zoning and parking enforcement.

At this stage of the item the Mayor moved to the third and final pool of Cabinet Members.

Councillor Flemming commended all the officers involved in the delivery of the Arena secondary school and also praised the work being undertaken by the Reaching Higher organisation.

Councillor Woodley announced that the food flagship borough programme had been included on the obesity gateway website as an example of best practice. In addition it was clarified that the projected £2.7million People department overspend for quarter three had in fact materialised as a £2.4million overspend at the end of that quarter.

- Councillor Hopley asked for information pertaining to the commission meetings that had been held in relation to the People department budget overspend. Councillor Woodley responded that the governance board meetings were a management tool and that there had been no monitoring of budgets by the previous administration. The meetings were held with the department's directors and looked at budget forecasts and demand management. By contrast, it was

claimed, the previous administration had outsourced most services and delivered low pay for staff.

- Councillor Rendle asked whether the Council would continue to fund prevention in health schemes, despite central government cuts. Councillor Woodley responded that smoking prevention was an example of the importance of this work, with a significant number of residents quitting smoking. The Food Flagship Borough was another example of the Council's prevention work.
- Councillor Margaret Mead welcomed the progress on the Food Flagship Borough and asked why the savings plans made in 2014 had not been implemented. Councillor Woodley responded that there had been no proper demand management by the previous administration and no monitoring of budgets. Savings under the previous administration were being based on outsourcing services and salami slicing departments.
- Councillor Margaret Mead asked a supplementary over what urgent action would be taken to get the deficit down. Councillor Woodley responded that there had been an overspend of over £4million in the year 2012/13 in the department under the previous administration and the previous administration had not been aware of it.
- Councillor Margaret Mead made a point of order that the claimed figures of the 2012/13 overspend were different to the figures produced for a recent health scrutiny meeting and Cabinet meeting. It was requested that clarity over the exact figure be made.
- Councillor Audsley asked what provision had been allocated for support for child refugees, in spite of the central government's rejection of the Dubs Amendment. Councillor Flemming responded that 200 children had been transferred to the borough through the Dubs programme and Croydon had been instrumental in supporting the scheme. The Cabinet Member commended local churches and residents for their support to the young people supported through the programme. The additional funding from the Home Office had been removed, then through Council pressure it was replaced. Croydon had the highest number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children than any other borough and other boroughs needed to play their part more and show commitment to the programme.

- Councillor Bains asked why the Alliance agreement had not yet been signed. Councillor Woodley stated that the CCG and NHS England were in special financial measures and therefore assurances were needed before signing the agreement. Some aspects of the agreement were already operating however the contracts were expected to be signed by the end of March 2017.
- Councillor Bains asked a supplementary question regarding the delays in providing opportunities for the third sector to operate services. Councillor Woodley responded that the question highlighted a misunderstanding of the contract. The stated priority was to ensure that the deal signed for was correct and value for money.
- Councillor Kabir asked for an update on the Council's autism services and in particular the Jubilee Parenting service. Councillor Flemming responded that the administration had a strong commitment to funding autism services and the income would be delivered through the Best Start programme. The administration had continued to invest in special education needs through more school places, such as the expansion of the St Nicolas school, and the Council was looking to deliver a special education needs school in the borough.

A9

Camera Resolution

Not required.

MINUTES - PART B

None

The meeting finished at 9.35pm.