

Council

Meeting held on Monday, 31 January 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Chair);
Councillor Felicity Flynn (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Kola Agboda, Hamida Ali, Muhammad Ali, Jade Appleton, Jamie Audsley, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Mike Bonello, Simon Brew, Alison Butler, Jan Buttinger, Louis Carserides, Janet Campbell, Robert Canning, Richard Chatterjee, Luke Clancy, Chris Clark, Pat Clouder, Stuart Collins, Mary Croos, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Mario Creatura, Nina Degrad, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Clive Fraser, Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson, Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Humayun Kabir, Bernadette Khan, Shafi Khan, Stuart King, Ola Kolade, Oliver Lewis, Toni Letts, Stephen Mann, Stuart Millson, Michael Neal, Oni Oviri, Ian Parker, Andrew Pelling, Jason Perry, Helen Pollard, Tim Pollard, Joy Prince, Badsha Quadir, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Pat Ryan, Paul Scott, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Caragh Skipper, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Robert Ward, David Wood, Louisa Woodley and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Simon Hoar

PART A

45/21 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

46/21 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

47/21 Announcements

Before the start of the meeting the Mayor explained that there were 18 Councillors present in the Council Chamber, while all other Councillors had joined online.

For residents watching at home, The Mayor explained that only Councillors present in the Council Chamber were able to vote at this meeting. Members attending remotely were able to ask and answer questions, and to speak during debates. Seats in the Chamber had been allocated to the two political groups based upon the total number of seats they held on the council overall.

The reason for holding the meeting this way was because the Council was required to hold its meetings in one place, but at the same time it was also required to minimise the risk of anyone transmitting COVID during the meeting. By running the meeting this way the Council had been able to avoid the significant cost of hiring a larger meeting space to accommodate all Councillors safely.

The Mayor also advised that he had agreed with both Groups that the order of the agenda was slightly amended. Item 8, the Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees for Decision, was heard after Item 5, Croydon Question Time.

The Mayor

In his announcements the Mayor thanked everyone who attended the Holocaust Memorial Day the previous Thursday. On Saturday 15 January, the Tamil Harvest and Thanksgiving Festival of Thai-Pongal was celebrated in Braithwaite Hall.

Unfortunately, both the Bollywood Dinner & Dance Fundraiser and the second round of the Mayoral Awards event had been cancelled, but there were a number of upcoming events in February and March.

The first was the International Language Day, honoured by UNESCO, which was being held in Braithwaite Hall on Monday 21 February. This was part of the International Language Week being held at Croydon Library from Monday 21 February to Saturday 26 February 2022.

The Mayor took this opportunity to mention that he would be working with the lead Cabinet Member and officers to bring forward proposals for the Council to agree to recognise and celebrate the Tamil Heritage Month of January and International Language Day every year.

The London Assembly had recently designated January to celebrate Tamil Heritage, which coincided with the Tamil celebration of Thai Pongal and the Mayor looked forward to working with the Cabinet Member and officers on bringing those proposals forwards.

Continuing with Mayoral events, he would be holding a charity fundraiser dinner, organised by the Royal Tandoori Selsdon and the Bangladesh welfare association on Monday 7 March.

This would be followed by a Cake Celebration on Friday 11 March to raise funds for the Mayor's charities.

There would also be a Tree Planting Ceremony at Croydon University Hospital on Wednesday 23 March to mark 'Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee 2022 and Looking to the Future from Covid' through The Queen's Green Canopy Initiative.

Finally, he would be celebrating Bangladesh Independence Day & Victory Day at Braithwaite Hall on a date to be confirmed during March.

The Leader

The Mayor invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali, to make her announcements.

The Leader confirmed that she had no announcements to make.

The Chief Executive

The Mayor invited the Chief Executive, Katherine Kerswell in her capacity as Head of Paid Service, to make her announcements.

The Chief Executive updated Members on the progress of recruitment to the new corporate management team. In addition to the appointments being covered later in the meeting, two further appointments had been made to the post of Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health and Annette McPartland had been appointed to that role. The other was to the Chief People Officer to which Dean Shoesmith had been appointed.

48/21

Council Debate Motions

The Mayor asked the Monitoring Officer, John Jones to read out the First Debate Motion on behalf of the Administration.

"The covid pandemic is the single biggest public health challenge since World War II, and Croydon residents have made tremendous sacrifices over this incredibly difficult and uncertain period."

People have lost loved ones before their time; children have not been able to witness their parents' final breath; and thousands have died alone without anyone by their side.

Over 150,000 people have died in the UK of COVID, with the total registered COVID Deaths in Croydon at 19 January being 1,125.

Colleagues on both sides of the Chamber have suffered the effects of this terrible virus as have their friends and family.

Businesses have been shattered; livelihoods irreversibly destroyed whilst Croydon nurses, teachers, police - and many key workers - have been pushed to their limits working all hours to keep society functioning.

Thousands of people in Croydon have made tremendous sacrifices over the last two years in complying with all legislation and guidance, to keep everyone safe and allow NHS and Council services to function safely for the benefit of all.

This Council applauds everyone who has followed these rules and supported efforts to keep us all safe in Croydon. The Council also calls upon all elected politicians nationally and locally, including the Prime Minister to adhere to all government legislation and guidance with regard to Covid, and to be held publicly accountable in respect of any breaches of Covid safeguarding."

The Mayor invited Councillor Pelling to propose the motion.

Councillor Pelling stated that great pride could be taken from what this council and the public health services had done. However, he continued by stating that there were some people of privilege within the Conservative Party who looked down their noses at Croydon and the way that the Prime Minister had behaved had raised very serious concerns with the people of Croydon.

Councillor Pelling continued by stating that it was now very interesting to see how the people of Croydon had come together and showed that Croydon cared for its neighbours and that the principles of equalities could be more than just a mantra.

In conclusion, Councillor Pelling felt that there was a real opportunity to enhance the community spirit and the willingness to work for the public good, whether Conservative or Labour or any other political persuasion so that the council could build on that consensus for equality.

Councillor Young seconded the motion.

Councillor Perry agreed that Covid-19 had been an unprecedented event in our lifetimes and had had the biggest impact in everyday lives across the world and the people of Croydon had responded with fortitude. Councillor Perry continued by acknowledging how tough it had been on individuals and businesses and stated that the council's frontline services had been amazing with some people literally putting their lives on the line to help others.

Councillor Perry continued by agreeing with Councillor Pelling that there was now a much greater sense of community spirit but that this had been against a backdrop of council cuts which had made the job of the voluntary sector in particular much harder. Councillor Perry listed the packages of support that the Government had provided but acknowledged that not every business had survived and that many thousands of people had died.

In conclusion, Councillor Perry acknowledged that it was disappointing that not all areas of Government had followed the rules and agreed that it was appropriate that those in public office should be held accountable for their actions at every level of Government and therefore supported the motion.

Councillor Kolade stated that this had been the biggest challenge for society in his lifetime and many had suffered as a result especially in regard to mental health, particularly young people. Despite this Councillor Kolade stated that he had been amazed by the resilience of the British public and praised the vaccination programme and the Government's business support packages which had meant that the country currently had the fastest growing economy in the G7.

Councillor Kolade continued by highlighting the Government support that Croydon had received and how this had been making a difference. Over the last 18 months Councillor Kolade had been proud of the leadership shown across the community in Croydon and listed those he wished to thank.

Councillor Kolade supported the motion as he believed that those in public office should be accountable to scrutiny of their actions.

Councillor Jewitt stated that the selfish behaviour of the Prime Minister had caused distress to the citizens of the UK and that whilst HM The Queen was sitting alone at the funeral of her husband and others were in physical and emotional pain, Boris Johnson was partying, and ignoring the rules he laid down for us.

Councillor Jewitt continued by stating that teachers and pupils had struggled to ensure that lessons could be accessed and listed some of the issues that had been encountered with the devices provided by Government. In addition, Councillor Jewitt stated that she believed that the parties had not had the struggle to obtain food that the poor, elderly and vulnerable had endured at the height of the pandemic.

Councillor Jewitt supported the motion and called on the party opposite to join her in saying that enough was enough.

The motion was put to the vote and was unanimously carried.

The Mayor asked the Monitoring Officer, John Jones, to read out the Second Debate Motion on behalf of the Opposition.

“Croydon is plagued by graffiti and fly tipping right across the borough and it is only getting worse.

It is well known that this Administration has utterly failed the people of Croydon by making choices that have directly led to the bankruptcy of our Council and the massive reduction of services to our residents.

But it is also failing in its basic duty to manage contracts, administer processes and supervise the real-world impact of its choices.

This Council calls on the Administration to apologise for its incompetence.

The choice to disband the graffiti removal team was just one such example.

This Council will commit to reinstating the graffiti removal team as a first step towards restoring pride in our borough.”

The Mayor invited Councillor Perry to propose the motion.

Councillor Perry stated that it was no surprise that residents were being failed by the Labour Administration which had run up huge debts and cut services in the hope of balancing the books. One of the blights on the borough was the increase in fly tipping and graffiti which was left for all to see for weeks at a time. Councillor Perry thanked those groups who persevered in reporting these problems.

Councillor Perry continued by stating that one of the most short-sighted cuts by the Administration was to disband the Graffiti Removal Team that provided such a fantastic service keeping the borough clean. Only offensive graffiti would now be removed but any graffiti was offensive to the businesses and community and deterred inward investment from the borough. In addition, Councillor Perry stated that the Administration did not invest resources into a Future High Streets bid which would have provided additional funding, some of which could have been used towards removal of graffiti and fly tipping. Councillor Perry supported the motion.

Councillor Roche seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Muhammad Ali reminded Members that fly tipping was a crime. However, the majority of Croydon residents cared about their neighbourhoods and it was a small minority of people who continued to drop litter, allowed their dogs to foul and carried out fly tipping. The rise in fly tipping was a national problem which had increased by 16% over the last two years and could result in a fine of up to £50,000 and a five-year prison sentence, and this council did not hesitate to prosecute individuals or businesses responsible where there was evidence. According to the Local Government Association fly tipping cost local authorities £50 million per year.

Councillor Ali continued by highlighting the councils' approach and stated that over 50 vehicles involved in fly tipping had been seized and approximately 1,100 fixed penalty notices had been issued. Councillor Ali reminded Members that it was everyone's responsibility to dispose of the waste they created.

With regards to graffiti, Councillor Ali stated that the council had not stopped the removal of graffiti from public land but from private land at taxpayers' expense.

In conclusion Councillor Ali thanked the army of volunteers who worked with the council and took pride in their streets and parks. Last year alone 2800 volunteers worked with the street champion co-ordinator to clear litter from Croydon's streets and parks.

Councillor Ben-Hassel stated that this motion touched on one of the issues that came up most in councillors' case work. However, this motion made it sound like fly tipping was on the rise because of this council's financial challenges and reminded Members that the fly tipping budget had not been cut. This motion undermined the education work being carried out in encouraging members of the public to report fly tipping.

Councillor Ben-Hassel continued by highlighting some issues caused by the current planning system such as inadequate bin provision for flats above shops which added to the problem. As stated earlier by Councillor Ali the problem had increased nationally and local authorities had lobbied Government for additional funding to tackle litter and fly tipping but had been rebuffed.

Councillor Roche stated that the borough was plagued by fly tipping and graffiti and a Labour Administration which failed to manage contracts. The cuts to services had impacted all residents no matter where they lived in Croydon, particularly regarding waste collection services and fly tipping where residents were not kept informed of progress after reporting an issue.

Councillor Roche continued by stating that the policy to remove only offensive graffiti meant that graffiti was still a blight on many areas, left residents frustrated, and showed that the Administration was out of touch and not fit to govern.

Councillor Roche supported the motion.

The motion was put to the vote and fell.

49/21 **Appointment of Corporate Director of Resources and Chief Finance Officer (S151)**

The Leader proposed the recommendations and congratulated all the successful candidates who had already been appointed the roles covered by the Chief Executive's statement earlier in the meeting.

Councillor Perry seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were unanimously carried.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendations in the report, to:

- 1.1 Note the decision of the Appointments Committee on 17 January 2022 to permanently appoint to the role of Corporate Director of Resources;
- 1.2 Agree the appointment of Jane West as the Council's Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer under the Local Government Act 1972, and;

- 1.3 Agree the above recommendations subject to the receipt of satisfactory pre-employment clearances.

The Mayor took the opportunity to congratulate Jane West on her appointment as the Council's new Section 151 Officer Chief Finance Officer and Corporate Director of Resources.

50/21 **Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2022

Review of Council Tax Support Scheme – 2022/23

The Leader proposed the recommendation.

Councillor King seconded the recommendation and the Mayor called on him to introduce the report.

The recommendation was put to the vote and was carried; however, under clause 117 of the Council's Constitution of Council Procedures, Councillor Pelling requested that his opposition was recorded.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendations in the report:

- 1.1 That the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme be amended to an income band scheme subject to the changes made following the consultation, from 1 April 2022. A full copy of the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme in the form to be recommended, is circulated as Appendix 1 to this report [Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report].

Education Estates Strategy

Councillor Flemming introduced the report and proposed the recommendation.

The Leader seconded the recommendation.

The recommendation was put to the vote and was carried.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendation in the report:

1.2 To agree the proposed community schools' Admission Arrangements for the 2023/24 academic year attached as Appendix 5 [Appendix 1 to the Cabinet report].

Report in the Public Interest October 2020 – Quarter 3 Update

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

Councillor King seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were unanimously carried.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendations in the report:

1.3 To note the progress the Council had made in regard to achieving the recommendations set out by external auditor in the Report in the Public Interest October 2020 with 65 out of 99 actions complete;

1.4 To note the outcome of internal audit of actions delivered to properly evidence what had been achieved so far, in order to provide full assurance to members and residents on the changes achieved;

1.5 To note the refreshed Action Plan including actions marked complete, progress updates against open actions and identification of actions to be embedded going forward as business as usual.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GENERAL PURPOSES & AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2022

Council Diary 2022-23

The Leader proposed the recommendations.

Councillor King seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were unanimously carried.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendations in the report:

1.6 To note the schedule of Full Council meeting dates for 2022/23, as agreed by the General Purposes & Audit Committee.

1.7 To note the schedule of Cabinet meeting dates for 2023/23 as detailed in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.12 of the report; and

1.8 To note the proposed schedule of remaining meeting dates for 2022/23, as recommended by the General Purposes & Audit Committee, as detailed in Appendix 17 and Appendix 18, depending on the outcome from GPAC on 25 January 2022.

51/21 **Croydon Question Time**

The Mayor explained that Croydon Question Time would be taken in two parts.

The first part was public questions to the Leader and Cabinet, which was followed by questions from Members to the Leader and Cabinet. Wherever possible, the Cabinet Member provided an answer during the meeting, but if a question required detail that the Cabinet Member did not have with them then a written response would be published on the Council website within the following three weeks.

Leader and Cabinet Member Questions

With the end of time allocated to questions from members of the public in attendance the Mayor moved on to public questions to the Leader and Cabinet Members.

Questions to the Leader

The Leader reminded Members that in November Cabinet began a search for a new Brick by Brick Board of Directors which would be led by both council officers and the existing Brick by Brick company directors. They had appointed an Executive Chair, Andrew Percival and a Non-Executive Director, [Griff Marshalsay](#).

The Leader continued by informing Members that at the first Brick by Brick Cabinet Advisory Board members had brought their expertise to the table as they worked towards the decisions that Cabinet had made to complete the existing sites before winding down the company.

In his question, Councillor Perry asked whether the Leader believed that all those responsible had been held accountable, since the two Reports in the Public Interest.

In her response, the Leader stated that in the last 15 months, taking over as Leader the day before the first Report in the Public Interest was published, she believed that significant progress had been made by the council, as stated by the Minister of State.

The Leader continued by reminding Members that the first Report in the Public Interest regarded corporate failures and that everyone in the Chamber had had to reflect on this. The further Report in the Public Interest would be discussed on Thursday (3 February 2022). However, none of the former officers were now in place, had been suspended or had left the council. In addition, Members with responsibility were no longer councillors as they had resigned from their roles.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Perry asked again whether the Leader believed that all those responsible had been held accountable.

In her response, the Leader stated that the council had used the powers that it could to take that action. Everyone shared the anger about what had happened, and all the officers no longer worked for the authority or were suspended, and all the senior councillors had resigned and had been referred to their membership bodies.

In her question, Councillor Henson welcomed the decision to pause the sale of Ashburton Lodge to allow the council and Oasis to explore the possibility of turning the lodge into a youth centre in memory of the young man who lost his life in Ashburton Park at the end of last year.

In her reply, the Leader stated that she was sure that all in the Chamber sent their condolences to the family of Zaian and thanked Councillor Henson for her role in representing the views of the family and the school and working with the Oasis Institution. The Leader also thanked Councillor King for removing Ashburton Lodge from the schedule of properties for auction and officers who had held a constructive meeting with Oasis to take this forward. Oasis had already begun its fundraising drive and the Leader wished it success with this.

In his question, Councillor Perry stated that the recent performance report showed that the Planning Department was trying to avoid special measures, and that the Housing Department was missing all its targets, and asked what the Leader and her Cabinet colleagues were doing to hold departments to account.

In her reply, the Leader stated that the performance report now came to Cabinet every month which highlighted what was going well but also areas

where improvement was necessary. The area for improvement section was a new feature of the report, in light of the Council's improvement and it was important that councillors and residents understood the changes being made and that officers were now being held to account.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Perry stated that the Leader was saying that everything was going as expected but that he had heard this before receiving the two Reports in the Public Interest and the Section 114 notices; so it appeared that this Cabinet was not taking full responsibility for what was happening. He asked once again whether this Council was taking responsibility.

In her response, the Leader stated it was a basic function of the council to look at the way it was performing and there were challenges across some of the services. The Leader continued by outlining the huge amount of activity that had taken place over the last 15 months to confront exactly what had been raised in the first Report in the Public Interest. The Government's appointed Improvement and Assurance Panel whose letters were consistently showing how the council both managerially and politically had been doing the right things to ensure that the necessary decisions were noted, and the council was financially sustainable.

The Leader concluded that the Secretary of State was pleased with the progress made so it was not just her but others outside of the council who were happy with the progress that had been made.

In her question, Councillor Ben-Hassel stated that last week the council's appointed auditors issued a second Report in the Public Interest relating to the Fairfield Halls governance and decisions dating back as far as 2016. Cllr Ben-Hassel asked the Leader to explain how such a publication had come about especially after such an extensive report had been produced by the same auditors in 2020.

In her reply, the Leader stated that in December 2020, she and the Chief Executive raised their concerns with the external auditors about what was emerging from the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls and commissioned the auditors to review this and the Report in the Public Interest that was delivered that previous week was the result. This showed an important shift in the culture as the first report from the auditors raised concerns that the council was not listening but this second report was a result of them being asked to look more closely into this issue. This showed that the council was better placed to raise concerns with the new leadership team that was being appointed.

In conclusion, the Leader stated that this report showed the council as it was previously and did not, in her view, show how the council was at present as those decisions were made more than 5 years ago and would not be taken today.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Ben-Hassel stated that anyone in the business of restoration of heritage buildings knew of the potential for over running costs and Fairfield Halls could be put into the context of the Barbican refurbishment. The issue that she encountered at Scrutiny was trying to obtain evidence that standard project management was being carried out. Councillor Ben-Hassel asked whether the Leader would provide residents with reassurance that such a situation could not happen again.

In reply, the Leader stated that the report had highlighted that £30 million would not be sufficient to deliver that project but agreed that the work carried out over the last 15 months would safeguard against this happening again in further projects. On Thursday (3 February) there would be an opportunity to look at it in more detail and the specific recommendations that the auditors had put forward. The Leader was confident that the changes being put in place would make the difference.

Pool 1

With the end of the time allocated for questions to the Leader, the Mayor moved to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool. Councillor Campbell, Councillor Lewis and Councillor Flemming were invited to make their announcements.

The Mayor confirmed that Councillor Mann was deputising for Councillor Campbell at this meeting.

Councillor Mann thanked and celebrated Annette McPartland being appointed as Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health on a permanent basis. Councillor Mann also congratulated the team for the work that had been carried out over the last few months and that the feedback from the Improvement Panel had been very strong.

Councillor Alisa Flemming had, with the Director of Social Care, visited Calley Down Crescent which recently won an award for the work that it did to support children and young people in the borough with complex needs and requested that her thanks were put on record.

Secondly Councillor Flemming highlighted the work that had recently restarted, post Covid, again launched in the Chamber, working with the young

people through the Youth Parliament towards championing the voice of young people. They had collectively decided to make mental health their first focus working with partners across the borough to support young people to confidently receive support when required.

Councillor Lewis had no announcements.

Councillor Gatland also thanked Calley Down for its fantastic work. In her question, Councillor Gatland stated that the cuts to Early Help services would damage the life chances of children and families and asked whether the plan to cut Youth Services at a time of such tragic loss and youth violence was a step too far.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that she was proud of the investment made by the Administration into youth provision at a time when no one else was, even though it was not a statutory service. In regards to the cuts to Early Help, Councillor Flemming stated that national government had not invested in this area and highlighted the work that the Administration had done.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Gatland stated that her previous question had not been answered and quoted figures showing that referrals had increased as had the number of children in need plans and the number of children with protection plans to above the London average which she put down to the cuts in services. Councillor Gatland asked again whether the Cabinet Member was cutting the funding for youth services.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that there were some proposals coming forward and confirmed that it had been expected that the number of referrals would increase post-Covid but that it was being monitored closely.

Councillor Flemming continued by informing Members of some of the key issues that lead to families being unable to cope, such as food poverty, the cost of fuel and the cost of living in the country and the borough, and stated that to be able to provide the support families needed required additional funding from central Government.

In his question, Councillor Clark stated that he had met with a gentleman who was living in supported housing for people receiving support for drug and alcohol addiction. The accommodation was linked to his treatment which had an end date, so he knows that he would be homeless on a given date. He had been told that the only way was to present himself to council offices as homeless on the day and arrangements would be made to place him in temporary accommodation.

Councillor Clark continued by stating that it would make more sense for housing to be arranged in advance in areas such as this where there was a fixed known date rather than being treated as an unforeseen emergency and asked whether this was correct and if so could the system be changed.

In his response, Councillor Mann thanked Councillor Clark for bringing this case to his attention and confirmed that he had already raised this case with officers to see what could be done. He also agreed that when any service provider knows of an issue of this nature then preventative action should be taken to streamline the process and reduce the fear for the service user.

In his question, Councillor Bains stated that there was a Report in the Public Interest regarding the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls under this Administration and asked whether Councillor Lewis would take this opportunity to apologise for what he had done?

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that like many people across the borough, he felt anger and indignation about what had been said in the Report in the Public Interest and thanked the Leader and the Chief Executive for commissioning the report.

Councillor Lewis continued by stating that he thought it was important to get to the bottom of why this project was overspent by so much and that over a years' work had gone into the report. The auditors had made it very clear where the responsibility for this lay and Councillor Lewis felt that it was important that those responsible for those failures should recognise that fact.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bains stated again that he felt that Councillor Lewis should apologise as the Cabinet Member who was ultimately responsible for the project.

In his response, Councillor Lewis reiterated that the Report in the Public Interest was very clear, and the responsibility lay with Brick by Brick and the Cabinet Members who oversaw it and a lot of the issues began in 2016 before Councillor Lewis was a Cabinet Member.

Councillor Lewis continued by explaining that as Cabinet Member for Culture his responsibility was not around the capital investment in Fairfield Halls or the council's relationship with Brick by Brick. His portfolio was responsible for the relationship with the operator and the cultural work that took place there.

In his question Councillor Fraser asked the Cabinet Member to comment on the leisure centre usage and activity since the end of lockdown last year and how it compared periods prior to Covid.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that the leisure industry had been under severe pressure as a result of the global pandemic and had been poorly supported by Government. However, since restrictions had been relaxed the people of Croydon had been returning to the leisure and sporting facilities and usage was now about 80% of what it was pre-pandemic.

Councillor Lewis continued by stating that although that was a good position to be in, the council would continue to support the leisure operator to continue to operate the centres in a way that was safe, given the nature of the public health emergency. He hoped that as a result, the people of the borough had enough confidence in them to return to the leisure centres in greater numbers going forwards.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Fraser asked what scope was there to encourage those who had not been to a leisure centre for two years to return to improve their level of fitness and what the council could do with its leisure partner to promote the leisure centre offer.

In his response, Councillor Lewis agreed that there was a lot that the council could do to support residents to use the centres and was pleased to confirm that the Administration would be investing £100,000 in Monks Hill Sports Centre to expand the size of the gym to give the residents in the south of the borough a greater fitness offer. The council's leisure partner Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) had also been offering promotions and discounts to engage in fitness for the new year and Councillor Lewis hoped that residents would take advantage of those offers.

In his question, Councillor Streeter asked whether there was any aspect of the Fairfield Halls refurbishment that he would take personal responsibility for.

In his response, Councillor Lewis reiterated his previous answer that a lot of work had gone into preparing the Report in the Public Interest which stated very clearly where responsibility for the failures in this project lay.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Streeter stated that Councillor Lewis had been involved in the Fairfield Halls project for a number of years including under the previous Leader, Councillor Newman, and asked again for him to apologise to the people of Croydon.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated again that it was important to get to the bottom of why the Fairfield Halls project was so overspent but that the Report in the Public Interest pointed to some significant failures in the governance of the project and how the project was commissioned. It was important that lessons were learned to improve future major projects. The project was always going to cost more than the initial £30 million and the council should now focus on supporting Fairfield Halls and supporting the operator to build an offer that was worthy of the support of the people of Croydon and could deliver top quality culture and entertainment.

In her question, Councillor Ben-Hassel asked whether the requirement for care home staff to have been vaccinated together with current staff sickness due to the Omicron variant was causing issues in council-run care homes or in any privately-run care home in the borough.

In his response, Councillor Mann stated that Croydon had the greatest number of care homes of any London borough so this issue would hit Croydon hard, but at present staffing levels remained strong and he was confident that any outbreaks within homes could be handled.

He continued by stating that the issue of vaccinations was a very delicate one as it affected the health of vulnerable residents and low paid workers, and noted that over the weekend the Government proposed a potential change of direction in this matter. However, vaccination rates amongst staff closely mirrored other London boroughs and was slowly increasing.

In concluding Councillor Mann reiterated the advice to be double vaccinated and to take up the booster as soon as it was offered.

In his question, Councillor Millson stated that Councillor Lewis became the Cabinet Member responsible for Fairfield Halls in May 2018 and asked when he had first questioned the senior leadership team or the Leader and Deputy Leader regarding the governance and over spending on the Fairfield Halls refurbishment.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that Councillor Millson was correct that he did become the Cabinet Member for Culture in May 2018 but reminded Members that his responsibility did not cover Brick by Brick. In the report the auditors stated that it had been difficult for Cabinet to obtain information from senior officers of Brick by Brick and the council. Councillor Lewis continued by stating that it was important that officers from both Brick by Brick and the council behaved with integrity and openness and provided councillors with information when requested.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Millson acknowledged that Councillor Lewis was not the Cabinet Member responsible for the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls and his acknowledgement that lessons had to be learnt but stated that in January 2020 Councillor Tim Pollard had presented evidence to Members that the project was going to cost more than double the original budget. Councillor Millson stated that Cabinet Members at the time should have been raising concerns and demanding information from officers and Cabinet colleagues and asked whether the failing of Cabinet Members to raise questions of officers was negligent of their duties to the people of Croydon or whether they were complicit in the unlawful expenditure.

In his response, Councillor Lewis reiterated that the Report in the Public Interest included a very detailed explanation and was very clear in stating where the responsibilities lay and who was at fault for these failings.

Pool 2

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool, the Mayor signalled he was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the second pool. Councillor Hay-Justice, Councillor Shahul-Hameed and Councillor Muhammad Ali were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Muhammad Ali had no announcements.

Councillor Hay-Justice had no announcements.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed confirmed that the Community Safety Strategy was implemented on 1 January 2022 and performance measures were currently being worked on. With regards to business recovery, Councillor Shahul-Hameed and officers had met with the Croydon Business Network the previous week to hear views on current and future needs of the business community which would inform the council on planning for the next round of Additional Restriction Grant funding. The council had now received £1.68 million in funding to deliver the Omicron Grant to hospitality and leisure businesses. Grants of up to £6000 were available and to apply businesses needed to complete an online application before 28 February 2022. In addition a further £250,000 is available for businesses in the creative industries.

In her question, Councillor Hale stated that in the latest Performance Report, tenant satisfaction with the Housing Service had continued to fall and asked the Cabinet Member why the service was still in trouble with falling satisfaction figures.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that she was not happy with the current situation; however, she thought it should be acknowledged that improvement was taking place. Officers were working exceptionally hard to ensure that those figures improved, and a recruitment drive was currently underway to fill posts where capacity was low.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hale stated that in addition to routine repair, urgent repairs and significant jobs had also seen a fall in performance and worryingly the one for urgent repairs was the worst of all with only half having been attended on time. In addition the length of time that properties were empty whilst repairs were carried out had increased. Councillor Hale asked whether in light of all these issues, the Cabinet Member

thought that she was doing a good job as Cabinet Member for Homes in this borough.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that the most urgent repairs were being done on time but acknowledged that the three other categories were not and that improvements were slower than anticipated. Councillor Hay-Justice continued by stating that she had been pushing hard for improvements and officers had been working additional hours including weekends, so she did believe that she was doing a good job as the Cabinet Member ensuring that residents' homes were safe, warm and dry.

In her question, Councillor Patsy Cummings stated that she was pleased to see the Cabinet report on Croydon Race Matters, now renamed the George Floyd Race Matters and Equalities Pledge and asked how the Cabinet Member was going to ensure that the council continued to work with the voluntary sector partners and others to promote the pledges amongst the organisations within the borough.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed thanked Councillor Cummings for her help and support regarding the pledges and stated that the Cabinet Report showed how closely the council was working with the voluntary sector in engaging with residents, businesses and the community. Councillor Shahul-Hameed continued by outlining the aims of the pledges and said that the progress would be reported in the annual Equalities Report. Community organisations would also submit an annual report and be monitored, and she welcomed support from Members to promote the pledge.

In her question, Councillor Hopley outlined a number of cuts that she said were affecting the most vulnerable in the borough and that there had been a worrying increase in the number of people who did not have a safe place to live. Councillor Hopley asked what the Cabinet Member intended to do about it.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice questioned the criteria being used regarding homelessness and confirmed that at the last count there were 16 people registered as homeless. The council had been working with Crisis and that week she attended a meeting of London lead officers from councils who wanted to know about the work that Croydon Council did to reduce the levels of homelessness, in spite of the lack of funding and the national issues imposed by Government. The work was being carried out in conjunction with the voluntary sector as a result of a lack of funding.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hopley questioned the figure of 16 homeless people and she stated that she knew of more than 16 people in the

underpass at the Whitgift Centre with more people sheltering in car parks, shop doorways and living outside the assistance centres. In light of this, Councillor Hopley asked if Councillor Hay-Justice was ashamed of this situation.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that her Deputy and officers had visited one site and every individual had been offered accommodation but that there were some people who did not wish to accept that accommodation.

In conclusion, Councillor Hay-Justice offered to ask officers to provide Councillor Hopley with a full report into the visit and asked that if she wanted to raise any particular case then could she do so outside of the meeting so that action could be taken.

In her question, Councillor Henson stated that earlier this year the council had lost some residents to a tragic house fire which was a reminder that all fire protections should be put in place in all forms of public and private buildings and asked the Cabinet Member to advise what was being done in regard to fire safety for council tenants.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice firstly sent her condolences to the family of those who died for their tragic loss. Councillor Hay-Justice continued by stating that the council had a fire risk assessment programme which was carried out with the frequency based on the risk and in high-risk properties the assessments were carried out annually, medium risk every two years and low risk every three years which complied with industry standard practice. Work was carried out on any issues identified during the assessments. In addition, staff responsible for those buildings could also bring issues to light.

In concluding Councillor Hay-Justice offered to send Councillor Henson more details of the work being carried out including the installation of sprinkler systems.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Henson stated that the case that she referred to was in a private property and asked what the council could do to help residents in private properties.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that about a third of the council properties were privately rented and the council was able to do work with this sector before the Secretary of State withdrew the council's licence. However, work was still carried out with landlords to ensure that they were complying with their responsibilities. In terms of owner occupiers, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that no work had yet been carried out to reach out to these residents. However, it could be possible to consider having a fire prevention

communications strategy and within that a reminder to test fire alarms perhaps to include carbon monoxide alarms.

In his question, Councillor Stranack stated that Croydon had the highest level of serious youth violence in London and very high levels of anti-social behaviour. Fairfield Ward had the highest level of crime and a particular hotspot was the underground car park and asked what the Cabinet Member could do to make the area safe.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that last year 5 young people had lost their lives as a result of knife crime and working with the Police was one of the priorities. The development of the Community Safety Strategy had been a piece of collaborative working where all the Community Safety Partnership members had an input together with views from the community and those organisations involved in supporting victims or helping to divert people away from crime.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed continued by explaining about the grants that the council had obtained with partners and the work that would be carried out as a result.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Stranack stated the Violence Reduction Unit was formed in 2019 and asked whether the Fairfield car park features within their key strategy for this year.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that extra police officers had been deployed to the town centre and the council was working with the Metropolitan Police in this area and others which were experiencing rising levels of crime. Further funding for the Violence Reduction unit had been made through The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) to replace the current funding which was due to expire in March 2022 and the priority would be around prevention.

Pool 3

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the second pool, the Mayor signalled he was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool. Councillor King and Councillor Young were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor King had intended to announce the work being undertaken with Oasis regarding Ashburton Lodge but the Leader had already covered this in detail earlier in the meeting. However, he did show his appreciation to

Councillor Henson for the support she had given to the project and the residents of Addiscombe East.

Councillor Young had no announcements.

In his question, Councillor Jason Cummings asked whether the reduction in borrowing published in the recent Capital Strategy for the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MFTS) had included the money lent to Brick by Brick and the money that the council had taken on in long term borrowing after the failed Fairfield Hall fiasco.

In his response, Councillor King stated that those figures were not included in the report.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings asked whether it was justified that the report celebrated the borrowing level reduction when the only reason a decrease in borrowing was shown was because the period did not include those amounts which went out immediately prior to its production which had resulted in the loss of millions of pounds to the council.

In his response, Councillor King questioned the use of the word celebrating but the report rightly noted that the council's borrowing was reducing by a not insignificant amount that he hoped Councillor Cummings would welcome.

In his question, Councillor Fraser asked whether the Government's Local Government Settlement finally respond to the cross-party consensus and demand for fair funding, a settlement for over one year and a reversal of underfunding for the last decade, inflicted on this and other local authorities.

In his response, Councillor King stated that the settlement failed on all three counts. It was once again a one-year settlement which undermined local authority's abilities to effectively set three-year budgets. It also failed to deliver on fair funding, which had left residents in places like Croydon disadvantaged compared to other areas.

In conclusion Councillor King stated that the council was now in the second decade of austerity with an 81% cut in grant funding, and he hoped that all Members appreciated that this was not in residents' interests.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Fraser asked whether the Cabinet Member agreed with him, that Croydon and other local authorities had seen a levelling down of their funding in recent years and austerity due to the underfunding from the Government.

In his response, Councillor King reiterated his earlier point regarding being in a second decade of austerity and that this authority and its residents had endured a huge cut in funding which did not reflect the needs of the borough.

Councillor King continued by stating that he applauded the Government's "Levelling Up" agenda but was worried that London would miss out as the perception was that levelling up would apply to the north of England and yet some parts of London had appalling levels of poverty, and he hoped that politicians across London would work together.

In his question, Councillor Kolade stated that in October last year the Cabinet Member talked about the ongoing review of contracts and asked whether he could provide an update on progress of these contract reviews.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that as a result of the work, £18 million of risk assessed savings were due to be made over time through the MTFS, and that £2 million of this was new and the challenge now would be delivery. The Council's commission and procurement function had been reviewed and a new staff structure was now in place with a new Head of Profession post being created, which was headed by Scott Funnell.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Kolade stated that there was a potential £11 million gap in the MTFS and that there should be greater urgency in reviewing the £7 million savings and asked when a plan on these potential savings would be made available.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that all contracts were reviewed, and officers were challenged to find savings. He stated that the £7 million referred to was a random figure which was to be looked at more carefully as there had been some double counting. As stated earlier £18 million of savings were identified with £2 million of new savings; not the £7 million quoted.

In her question, Councillor Croos asked what savings were now expected to be made through council contracts and how the council was approaching this.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that this appeared to be the same question so repeated his previous answer. However, with regards to delivery, Councillor Young explained that the new structure had been put in place with the Head of Profession and that commissioning for Adults and Children sat within those service areas. Being better focussed the system should improve service delivery for residents.

In his question, Councillor Jason Cummings stated that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was under continuing pressure this year principally relating to

repairs which was predicted to cause an overspend which would need to be covered by reserves. Given that this pressure was unlikely to ease over the short term he asked the Cabinet Member how he was intending to bring this back into balance avoiding the erosion of reserves in the HRA.

In his response, Councillor King reminded Members that early in the financial year the possible overspend was why the HRA was initially within the scope of the Spending Control Panel but was removed although still monitored regularly. Councillor King continued that he had discussed with colleagues the possibility of returning the HRA to the Spending Review Panel restrictions, but he personally did not think that it was necessary at this time, although the situation was being monitored closely.

Councillor King also stated that the proposal to increase council tenants' rents by 4.1% was due to come before Cabinet shortly and that this would help to reduce the overspend and that other avenues were also being explored to bring the HRA back within budget.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings asked whether the proposed rent increase would only reduce inflationary pressures and questioned whether it was correct that tenants would be expected to pay for overspends in the system.

In his response, Councillor King confirmed that residents were not going to be expected to pay for the overspend but the council did need to ensure that inflationary pressures did not make the overspend worse. Work was going on to identify areas for savings but reassured Members that there were sufficient reserves to cover the current forecast overspend.

In his question, Councillor Kolade stated that contract inflationary pressures were a growing risk to the MTFs and asked what the Cabinet Member was doing to make sure that this was absorbed.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that no assumptions were being made and that the council would be negotiating hard, but he was aware that it would not be possible in all circumstances; therefore, the Section 151 Officer had ensured reserves were available for inflationary pressures.

In her question, Councillor Jewitt asked how it could be fair that Croydon received about half as much funding from Central Government compared to inner London boroughs and asked what the current situation regarding cross-party working were.

In his response, Councillor King stated that the Government had consistently failed to deliver on its fair funding commitment since 2010. Councillor King compared Croydon with Lambeth which received £210 per head more despite having similar demography and challenges.

Councillor King continued by outlining the cross-party work which was being co-ordinated by London Councils and despite the political differences much collaborative work was being undertaken to get a better funding deal.

In his question, Councillor Jason Cummings stated in response that there was also a significant number of London boroughs that received less funding per head than Croydon and they had not been issued Section 114 Notices; therefore, not all the issues in Croydon were down to a lack of Government funding.

Councillor Cummings continued by stating that the level of debt taken on regarding the Fairfield Halls refurbishment resulted in an additional £1.5 million of pressure every year. He asked the Cabinet Member what questions he had asked whilst this debt was rising.

In response, Councillor King stated that since he had become Deputy Leader, he had been focussed on addressing the council's finances and assisting the Leader in addressing the problems of the recent past. The independent auditor had spent a year looking into this matter and the report had been very clear in identifying the individuals who were culpable. Councillor King continued by stating that he was confident that the changes put in place would stop this situation happening again.

Councillor King concluded by stating that residents were justified in their anger that their money was not properly safeguarded and as Deputy Leader he apologised for that.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings welcomed Councillor King's apology but stated that his question related to the fact that the Cabinet Member was in Cabinet meetings, not public ones, of which there were no records; so they would not appear in any report; therefore, he asked again what questions Councillor King raised about this issue in Cabinet.

In his response, Councillor King stated that as set out in the report information was not brought before Cabinet in the way that it should have been and that those were the failings that the auditor identified in her report, but that a lot of work had been undertaken to ensure that this could not happen again.

In her question, Councillor Jewitt asked what the guiding principles of the Croydon Interim Asset Disposal Strategy were, and what progress had been made.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that given the financial situation of the council it was important to achieve the best possible results from any disposals and he outlined some of the circumstances which were taken into consideration before agreeing a disposal.

Councillor Young concluded by outlining some of the recent disposals and that further disposals would make an important contribution to balancing the books and to living within the council's means.

With an end to the time allocated to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool, the Mayor brought Croydon Question Time to a close.

The meeting ended at 9.48 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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