

Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 14 December 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sue Bennett (Vice-Chair);

Councillors Kola Agboola, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Adele Benson, Margaret Bird, Claire Bonham, Mike Bonello, Simon Brew, Janet Campbell, Louis Carserides, Chris Clark, Sherwan Chowdhury, Stuart Collins, Mario Creatura, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Nina Degrad, Rowenna Davis, Danielle Denton, Samir Dwesar, Sean Fitzsimons, Amy Foster, Simon Fox, Gayle Gander, Maria Gatland, Brigitte Graham, Matthew Griffiths, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Christopher Herman, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Mark Johnson, Humayun Kabir, Stuart King, Ola Kolade, Joseph Lee, Endri Llabuti, Enid Mollyneaux, Michael Neal, Tamar Nwafor, Ian Parker, Ria Patel, Tony Pearson, Jason Perry, Ellily Ponnuthurai, Holly Ramsey, Helen Redfern, Chrishni Reshekaron, Scott Roche, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Luke Shortland, Andy Stranack, Stewart, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Alisa Flemming, Jade Appleton, Richard Chatterjee, Lara Fish, Clive Fraser, Maddie Henson, Mohammed Islam, Stella Nabukeera, Eunice O'Dame, Nikhil Sherine Thampi and Appu Srinivasan Srinivasan

PART A

1/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

Before commencement of the meeting it was **MOVED** by Mayor Jason Perry, **SECONDED** by Councillor Stuart King, and;

RESOLVED unanimously to nominate Councillor Sue Bennett, Deputy Civic Mayor of Croydon, as Chair for the meeting.

Councillor Esther Sutton declared that she was a resident of Oval Road, and as such that she would not be contributing to any discussion on the items on the agenda relating to that location.

2/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

3/21 **Announcements**

The Chair **MOVED** to suspend Council Procedure Rules for the commencement of items 7 and 8 in order to ensure there was plenty of time in the meeting to properly consider all substantive items of business. This was **SECONDED** by Councillor Mario Creatura, and;

RESOLVED to reduce the amount of time available for each Maiden Speech to two minutes, and to reduce the total time for questions to the Mayor and Cabinet to 80 minutes.

The Head of Paid Service and Returning Officer announced that Councillor Fatima Zaman had won the recent Selsdon Vale and Forestdale ward by-election.

4/21 **Croydon Question Time**

In response to a question regarding debt and bankruptcy, Councillor Jason Cummings responded that the council would take all actions necessary to return Croydon to financial sustainability.

Answering a question regarding the Forestry Commission Fund Councillor Scott Roche stated he had asked officers to prioritise this project, and that the tree and woodlands officers would be installing the required tree pits by the end of February 2023, and those in Oval Road by 1 March 2023.

In a question regarding the stance of leaseholders of Messer Court following the legislation around council-owned building cladding, Councillor Lynne Hale explained that a statutory consultation period had begun, and that resident meetings would be held early in 2023. Councillor Hale also asked the questioner to provide details of any leaseholders who had not received any correspondence updating them on the position regarding cladding, to ensure that they would be informed. Councillor Hale also explained that although the council was not aware of any collaborative work being done with the banks, it did work with all those included in the legislative framework to deal with the safety issues around cladding.

In response to a question about whether or not Croydon Council would lock its public parks at night, Councillor Scott Roche explained that not only are many of the borough's parks and green spaces open and not lockable, but the council did also not have the available financial resources to lock all parks at

night. Councillor Roche stated that council and police had set out a renewed commitment to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), and that the council would act on any specific safety concerns raised.

5/21 **Member Petitions**

Councillor Ola Kolade responded to the petition from the Fairfield ward members and local Member of Parliament regarding public safety in the area, stating that he fully understood the concerns, and that the council was acting alongside the police to address them. This included increased presence of Neighbourhood Support Officers and increased use of Public Space Protection Orders. The council was also doing outreach work for local young people, and the local Business Improvement District (BID) had set up public engagement meetings to share their experiences and discuss possible courses of action.

Councillor Scott Roche responded to the petition from Councillor Maddie Henson regarding implementing a one-way street in Addiscombe East ward. Councillor Roche stated that it was important to be mindful of the overall effects on traffic and consequences for residents when assessing Traffic Management Orders (TMOs), and the lengthy process involved should it be agreed to fit this one-way street.

6/21 **Recommendations from the Executive or Committees to Council for decision**

The Chair of the Licensing Committee introduced the report to members, outlining the reasons for the committee's decision to adopt the new Statement of Licensing Policy and Cumulative impact Areas.

RESOLVED, unanimously to:

- 1.1. Adopt the revised Statement of Licensing Policy 2023-2028 under the Licensing Act 2003 as set out at Appendix 1 to the report and that the revised policy be operative as of 1 February 2023.

Mayor Jason Perry then addressed Council for three minutes, outlining the five core outcomes of the Mayor's Business Plan to deliver change for residents, and which required the council to fix its finances.

Councillor Amy Foster **MOVED** to debate the recommendations, which was **SECONDED** by Councillor Chris Clark.

During the debate, Councillor Foster argued that the plan did not do enough to tackle some of the most pertinent issues for Croydon's residents, including homelessness, school exclusions, and poor health. Councillor Foster argued that the plan relied too heavily on the goodwill of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) to fill the gaps in the budget, and that the plan avoided the prevention of major issues and lacked detail.

For the approval of the plan, Councillor Helen Redfern argued that the plan reflected the Mayor's manifesto pledges, which the residents of Croydon had endorsed with their votes. Councillor Redfern argued that the plan would restore pride in the borough, moving it away from the poor governance and financial mismanagement of the past, which had led to the loss of services.

On behalf of the Opposition, Councillor Chris Clark argued that there were missed opportunities in the plan. Councillor Clark also highlighted that the plan relied on the VCFS to support its delivery, but that in contradiction the Mayor planned to cut the community fund. Councillor Clark also argued that the Mayor's Business Plan made no commitment to deliver on climate emergency measures which had been recommended to the council, and that, based on information provided in the Equalities Impact Assessment, vulnerable groups of the community may be disserved by the plan.

Mayor Jason Perry concluded the debate by reminding all present that Croydon was in its current state due to the poor governance and financial mismanagement of the previous political administration, and that the plan was put together by listening to the most vulnerable and with a manifesto that residents had voted for. Mayor Perry stated that detailed delivery strategies would support the plan.

The Chair then opened the vote and Council **RESOLVED**, with 30 votes in favour, 29 votes against, and one abstention, to:

- 1.1 Adopt the Mayor's Business Plan 2022-26.
- 1.2 Note that a detailed implementation plan and performance framework will be brought to a future meeting of Cabinet.
- 1.3 Note the arrangements to provide assurance of the implementation of the Plan.

The Chair invited members who had submitted their names to ask questions in order, the first of whom was Councillor Pearson, who asked whether the previous political administration of the council had accepted its responsibility in causing the current financial issues. The Mayor replied that the result of the vote on the previous item demonstrated that members of the Opposition had not.

Councillor King asked how many of Croydon's libraries would be closed at the end of the Mayor's term of office, to which the Mayor explained that libraries were listed as potential disposals to support the delivery of a balanced budget, but that the number was currently unknown.

In response to a question from Councillor Sutton regarding rough sleepers, the Mayor explained that homeless people were treated with respect and compassion, and that the council had engaged with Thames Reach to support the worsening homelessness situation in the borough. The Mayor also explained that support and resources were in place and that the government had announced additional funding, the details of which were yet to be known.

In response to a question from Councillor Bonham regarding members whose wards provided accommodation for asylum seekers, the Mayor explained that the council was forming a report based on a very positive meeting it had had with the Home Office Minister Robert Jenrick, which would address funding, finances and safeguarding support. The Mayor also agreed to meet the members in the wards in question.

In response to a question from Councillor Benson regarding residents of Regina Road the Mayor explained that a consultation was currently underway and that a Housing Transformation Plan was being implemented.

In response to a question from Councillor King regarding businesses suffering financially, namely Matthew's Yard, the Mayor explained that he shared concerns for struggling businesses, but that requests for discretionary rate relief would be dealt with appropriately according to the individual needs and circumstances of requests.

Councillor Ward asked the Mayor to explain the issues with the Fairfield Halls refurbishment plan, which had left a debt of £76m to the council, to which the Mayor replied that an investigation was currently underway by Kroll into whether there had been fraud involved.

Councillor Campbell asked whether the Mayor thought that the waiting list for NHS hospital care in Croydon was acceptable at 27,450 people, to which the Councillor Campbell asked whether the Mayor thought that the waiting list for

NHS hospital care in Croydon was acceptable at 27,450 people, to which the Mayor responded that Healthcare had recently been awarded for its good service. Councillor Hopley added that elective surgery continued during COVID and no residents were turned away from emergency services during COVID. The Trust was recognised as a centre of excellence of which members were very proud.

Councillor Gander asked the Mayor to explain what the Section 114 notice would mean for residents' services. The Mayor explained that services would need to be cut, and that libraries may be affected. The Mayor explained that the £1.6bn debt left by the previous political administration caused these issues, and that the scale of the problem had been the most shocking discovery during the exercise of investigating the previous errors.

Councillor Patsy Cummings raised a point of order, which the Chair allowed. Councillor P Cummings explained that an earlier comment made by the Mayor, who stated that the waste contract provider, Veolia, had not met with an elected member in two years, was untrue. Councillor P Cummings explained to Council that she and another previous member had met with Veolia within that time.

In response to a question from Councillor Fitzsimmons, the Mayor congratulated everyone involved on reopening the Jolly Sailor pub to the community in South Norwood and agreed to support the reopening of the Glamorgan pub also.

In response to a question from Councillor Lee the Mayor explained that the impact of the enormous debt the council faced was reduced services.

In response to a question from Councillor Young the Mayor explained that the Thornton Heath clocktower had been protected by hoarding since it suffered damage from fire, but that it required specialist attention to repair; so the repair would not be as quick as had been hoped.

In response to a question from Councillor Fox, the Mayor explained that the Opening the Books exercise, which was investigating the shortfalls in the council's accounts from previous years, was expected to be completed in January.

In response to a question from Councillor Kabir the Mayor agreed to check that all council tenants whose energy bills were included in their rent payments had also received the cost-of-living energy rebate. Members were urged to contact the Mayor regarding residents who had not received their support payments.

In response to a question from Councillor Shortland the Mayor stated that the council hoped to create an environment where people wanted to invest and shop, and that the town and district centres would be grown. It was intended that Public Space Protection Orders would reduce anti-social behaviour which would help to achieve this.

In response to a question from Councillor Reshekaron the Mayor stated that the council had introduced a residents' charter and was implementing a Housing Transformation Plan to deal with housing issues, but that it would not commit to carrying out a full borough or selective landlord licensing scheme at present.

In response to Councillor Johnson the Mayor stated that contract management issues were being corrected, and that proper procurement processes were now in place.

The Mayor is explained that there was just under £1m of funding to support families over Christmas, and that there were also household support grants. He also explained that the council was doing all it could to mitigate cost-of-living pressures.

Councillor Wilson asked whether the Mayor could reconsider the position of two centres that provided support for people with learning disabilities that had been earmarked for closure, to which the Mayor responded that the council would look into how it could best support the users of the services and those who worked in those centres.

Councillor Herman asked how the new waste contract would be an improvement, to which the Mayor responded that there would be a consultation period over the next year or so, and that it was being built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy but was at a very early stage of the process.

8/21 **Maiden Speeches**

Council heard the Maiden Speeches from Councillor Luke Shortland, Coulsdon Town Ward; Councillor Catherine Wilson, Selhurst Ward; Councillor Claire Bonham, Crystal Palace and Upper Norwood Ward; and Councillor Matt Griffiths, Norbury and Pollards Hill Ward.

9/21 **Response to External Auditor's Query regarding the Former Chief Executive's Settlement Payment**

The Chair invited both Mayor Jason Perry and Councillor Stuart King who had expressed their wishes to speak on this item, who stated that:

- The decision should never have been allowed to be made;
- The Mayor did not vote for it;
- The report stated that the committee was not given full disclosure, and that due process and the constitution of Croydon were not respected;
- Processes were now in place to ensure that this could not happen again, and that members would see a short summary of those processes in due course;
- That recoupment of the amount was still subject to further legal consideration;
- There were significant failings in the information presented to the Appointments Committee in April 2020, with which the current Appointments Committee did not agree; and,
- That Council should decide payments of over £100k to individuals going forward.

It was **MOVED** by Mayor Jason Perry, **SECONDED** by Councillor Stuart King, and **RESOLVED**, unanimously to:

1. Note the Council's response to the External Auditor's query and attached as Appendix 1. Note that the response is based on the Monitoring Officer's findings following due diligence enquiries undertaken.

10/21 **South London Waste Plan Development Plan Document - Adoption**

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Jeet Bains, **SECONDED** by Councillor Scott Roche and **RESOLVED**, unanimously to:

Adopt the South London Waste Plan 2022 to 2037, subject to the recommendations in the Inspector's Report as a Development Plan Document in accordance with The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012

11/21 **Use of Special Urgency for Key Decisions**

It was **MOVED** by Mayor Jason Perry, **SECONDED** by Councillor Lynne Hale, and **RESOLVED**, unanimously to:

Note the use of Special Urgency for the key decision listed at section 3.4 of the report during the period October to December 2022.

12/21 **Appointments**

RESOLVED, to:

1. Remove Councillor Danielle Denton from the Audit and Governance Committee;
2. Appoint Councillor Nikhil Sherine Thampi to the Audit and Governance Committee;
3. Appoint Councillor Danielle Denton to the vacant seat on the Licensing Committee; and,
4. Appoint Councillor Fatima Zaman to the vacant seat on the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education.

13/21 **Council Debate Motions**

Councillor Lynne Hale **MOVED** and spoke on behalf of the Conservative Group motion, mentioning the appalling conditions residents had been left living in at the Regina Road estate. Councillor Hale stated that residents had been shown a lack of respect through the failure of the council to provide basic housing services in previous years, and that the Mayor had put rectifying the situation at the top of the council's agenda through the Housing Transformation Programme.

Councillor Simon Fox **SECONDED** the motion and reserved his right of reply, after which Councillor Christopher Herman spoke on behalf of the Opposition, stating that tenants and leaseholders had been ignored due to a poor culture within the Housing Department. Councillor Herman stated that members had been assured issues had been resolved in the past when they had not.

Councillor Reshekaron, speaking on behalf of the Opposition, stated that she welcomed the Mayor's plan for a consultation on the regeneration of the estate, and that the council was taking its first steps in a long process to improvement. Councillor Reshekaron thanked the Housing Director and officers working on this process for ensuring that residents' voices were heard. Councillor Reshekaron asked why compensation had not been issued to tenants and leaseholders who suffered from the long-standing issues.

Exercising his right of reply, Councillor Fox stated that under the previous leadership action had been delayed, and residents' cries for help were

ignored. Councillor Fox blamed a lack of urgency that followed the adverse publicity about the Regina Road estate, which meant a previous Housing Improvement Plan was never signed off, and stated that the current Housing Transformation Programme was more comprehensive, and commanded support.

The motion was put to the vote and **RESOLVED**, unanimously to:

Consult on potential regeneration to provide a long-term solution that provides high quality housing for our Council Tenants and Leaseholders.

Councillor Rowenna Davis then MOVED the motion from the Opposition Group, stating that residents were too anxious to turn on their heating because of unaffordable energy bills. Councillor Davis commented that she had noticed the council had recently begun advertising council-owned public spaces and those provided by the VCFS that were available for residents to use during cold weather, but that no spaces were available on Sundays.

Councillor Brigitte Graham SECONDED the motion and reserved her right of reply, after which Councillor Andy Stranack stated his delight to support the motion and thanked officers for the hard work that had already been done. Councillor Stranack also outlined all the other ways the council was providing support to vulnerable residents over the Christmas holiday period.

Councillor Tony Pearson speaking on behalf of the Conservative Group iterated that the party was willing to work collaboratively for the good of Croydon residents.

Exercising her right of reply, Councillor Graham stated that signposting on websites was not enough, and that the council was relying too heavily on the VCFS.

The motion was then put to the vote and Council **RESOLVED**, unanimously to:

1. Promote Croydon's existing Warm Banks on its website in the Cost-of-Living Support section as well as regularly through its social media channels;
2. Review the Council's properties, particularly libraries, to see if any could be used as Warm Banks during existing opening hours; and,

3. Invite other organisations, including businesses, faith and community groups, to open their doors to Croydon's citizens by serving as Warm Banks.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

Signed:

Date:

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