

## General Purposes Committee

Meeting of held on Tuesday, 5 November 2024 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,  
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Sean Fitzsimons (Chair);  
Councillor Appu Srinivasan (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Samir Dwesar, Lara Fish, Patricia Hay-Justice, Joseph Lee,  
Stella Nabukeera and Andrew Price

**Apologies:** None.

### PART A

8/24 **Apologies for Absence**

There were none.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Joseph Lee who joined the meeting at 6.41pm.

9/24 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

10/24 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

**RESOLVED:**

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 as an accurate record of the proceedings.

11/24 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

12/24 **The Election Review Report**

The Head of Elections & Civic Mayors Office, Seth Alker, presented the Election Review report, highlighting the lessons learned from the 2022 elections and the improvements made for the general election. He

discussed project management, staff training, polling station arrangements, and the challenges with absent voting:

Project Management: Seth emphasised the importance of project management, noting that a good balance was struck between oversight and quick decision-making, which will be the model for future elections.

Staff Training: Seth highlighted the extensive training provided to poll clerks and presiding officers, including in-person and online training, which will be built upon for future elections.

Polling Station Arrangements: Seth discussed the review of polling places and districts, noting that individual issues would be incorporated into the review to improve future arrangements.

Absent Voting Challenges: Seth detailed the challenges with absent voting, including postal vote timetables, print contractor capacity, and Royal Mail performance. He emphasised the need for better information for electors and potential changes to the system.

Polling Station Issues: Seth Alker addressed the issue of a polling station in New Addington being occupied by squatters, which required finding an alternative venue. He emphasised the need for better business continuity arrangements for polling stations.

Count Venue and Staffing: Seth Alker discussed the successful use of Bernard Weatherill House as the count venue noting its accessibility, space, and value for money and mentioned the possibility of using other venues such as Fairfield Halls in the future, depending on availability and capacity. The decision would be reviewed closer to the 2026 elections.

Staffing Arrangements: Seth discussed the effective staffing arrangements, including the use of experienced count supervisors and a robust escalation procedure for any issues that might arise during the count.

Seth informed the Committee that in light of the House of Commons's report on the general election and declarations before 4.00 pm, Croydon had significantly improved its position over most local authorities. He also took Members through the summary of actions and learning points from the election review and highlighted the following planned actions:

- Polling Station Review: general business continuity arrangements to expanded to include reserve locations for polling stations and investigate the use of mobile units for emergency situations.
- Recruitment for Electoral Services: Advertise and recruit for the vacant electoral services manager post within the next month.

- Polling District Review: the polling district review to include an assessment of the suitability and access of polling stations and consider alternative arrangements if necessary.
- Communication of Polling Station Changes: the process for communicating changes to polling stations to electors to be improved including timely notifications and clear information.
- Postal Vote System Improvement: Work with the government and relevant bodies to address national issues with the postal vote system, including capacity and delivery timelines.

The Chair and Members of the Committee commended the efforts of the Returning Officer, the Elections Team for the apparent improvements in the arrangements for the elections held on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2024 and thanked the Head of Elections & Civic Mayors Office for the report.

**RESOLVED** to Note the Returning Officer's Review Report of the General Election on 4<sup>th</sup> July attached as Appendix 1. 3.

13/24

### **Constitution Review – Part 4A, Council Procedure Rules**

Adrian May, the former Interim Head of Democratic Services presented the proposed amendments to the Council Procedure Rules, which included amendments to the processes for Council tax and budget meetings, and the handling of policy items as part of the budgetary and policy framework.

Adrian highlighted the minor amendments to the first Council tax and budget meeting procedures to include practical steps taken in previous meetings, such as allowing the Green Group and Liberal Democrat Member to speak and publish amendments.

Second Meeting Procedures: Adrian also outlined the second meeting procedures for Council tax and budget items, including the formal debate and voting on amendments, with a 2/3 majority required for approval.

Policy Items Handling: Adrian explained the streamlined process for handling policy items as part of the budgetary and policy framework, including reduced speaking times and the role of the relevant scrutiny chair.

The Chair informed the Committee the proposed changes was reviewed and had received broad support from Members at the meeting of the Constitution Working Group on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

For the reasons set out in the report, the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- 1.1 To review and comment on the proposed revisions to the Constitution as detailed in the report;
- 2.2 To approve the amended version of Part 4A (as set out in Appendix 1/1i – Council Procedure Rules) and Part 4C of the Constitution (as set out in Appendix 2/2i - Budget & Policy Framework Procedure Rules);
- 2.3 To recommend the adoption of the changes to the Council Procedure Rules to Full Council.
- 2.4 To authorise the Monitoring Officer to make any additional but minor amendments to Part 4A and Part 4C of the Constitution for tidying up or clarification purposes or to correct any drafting slips prior to reporting them to Full Council for adoption.

14/24

### **Proposed Changes to the Constitution relating to Planning Matters**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda and deferred for further consultation.

15/24

### **Miscellaneous Changes to the Constitution**

The Deputy Monitoring Officer, Looqman Desai, presented the report on miscellaneous changes to the Constitution, which included, updates to the appointment of chairs and vice chairs of committees and corrections to the Scheme of Co-option.

For the reasons set out in the report, the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED** to:

- 2.1.1 review and comment on the proposed changes to the Constitution contained in section 4 of this report and Appendices 1 and 2; and
- 2.1.2 recommend to Full Council the approval of the proposed changes.

16/24

### **Council Calendar 2025-26**

For the reasons set out in the report, the General Purposes Committee **RESOLVED**:

- 1.1 To agree the Council meetings for the municipal year 2025-26;
- 1.2 To note the Cabinet meeting dates for the municipal year 2025-26;
- 1.3 To recommend that full Council approves the meeting dates for all

other committees for the municipal year 2025-26.

The Chair informed the Committee that it was the final meeting of the year, expressed gratitude to Members and officers, particularly Democratic Officers and the Deputy Monitoring Officer, for their hard work, and extended festive wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

The meeting ended at 7.54 pm