

DRAFT MINUTES

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON

Monday 18 September 2017 at 8.00pm in the Council Chamber, the Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

Present: Councillor H Ali, Councillor J Audsley, Councillor J Avis, Councillor J Bains, Councillor S Bashford, 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 L Clancy, Councillor P Clouder, Councillor S Collins, Councillor M Creatura, Councillor J Cummings, Councillor P Cummings, Councillor S Fitzsimons, 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 Khan, Councillor S King, Councillor T Letts, Councillor O Lewis, Councillor M Mansell, 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 absence were received from Councillors Thompson, Mohan, Kyeremeh, Margaret Mead, Dudley Mead, Clouder and Ryan.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Wentworth and Bonner.

A2 Disclosure of Interest

No declarations were made.

A3 MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE COUNCIL

The motion for consideration, submitted by Members of the Opposition, read:

“This Council regrets the failure of this Labour administration to operate safe and effective children and families social services and apologises to the people of Croydon for running a service found by OfSTED in September 2017 to be inadequate across the board. The Council pledges to deal with the failures and weaknesses outlined by the report including addressing the poor political oversight highlighted.”

The motion was moved by Councillor Tim Pollard and seconded by Councillor Gatland.

An amendment to the motion was submitted by Members of the Majority Party and read:

“This Council regrets the failure to operate as effectively as possible our children & families social services and has apologised to the residents of Croydon for the recent Inadequate Ofsted report. This Council pledges to deal with all the weaknesses and failures outlined in the report and notes the progress reported at Cabinet of our Improvement plan that has begun to address the issues raised.

The amendment was proposed Councillor Flemming and seconded by Councillor Newman.

Councillor Tim Pollard, speaking in favour of the motion, stated that in his time as a Councillor he had never read such a serious report as the recent Ofsted account of the Council’s children’s services. The report identified serious failures to children and their families, leaving some children at risk of significant harm. Since the authority was inspected in 2012, the report stated, there had been a significant deterioration of the service.

Councillor Pollard stated that all Members were corporate parents, and thus shared the duty of the wellbeing of young people in the Council’s care. However, it was stated, the Leader and Cabinet Member had access to all the information they needed to run the service and had failed to do so. The report was scathing of the leadership of the service, and Councillor Pollard stated that this was an indictment on their leadership. It was further stated that both Councillors had used media platforms to pass the blame from themselves. The Safeguarding Board Chair was being blamed, as

were previous Council officers and central government. The latter were blamed for funding cuts, yet funding in children's services had increased by 26%. In 2012 the service was rated as adequate, and since the Labour administration was elected in 2014, Councillor Pollard claimed that, this good work had deteriorated. Councillor Pollard called for Councillors Newman and Flemming to resign and allow for other Members to step forward.

Councillor Flemming, speaking in favour of the amendment, apologised to the people of Croydon for the failings identified in the report. It was stated that the young people of Croydon deserved the very best service and Councillor Flemming committed to exceeding the improvements already identified moving forward. A bespoke service that catered for each individual young person's needs was required – the ultimate focus was to ensure an excellent service for young people. It was disingenuous to compare the 2012 inspection with the current one; the inspection framework ran from 2013. It was widely recognised that the new framework was much more rigorous and a significant number of authorities had been rated inadequate or requiring improvement under the new regime. This was not a justification for the poor rating received, but placed it within the context of the changing Ofsted framework. Croydon had undertaken a serious case review to ensure best practice was being utilised within the service. The promotion of the children in care council would identify the strengths and weaknesses within the service, and such work had already been undertaken through work such as the youth congress. All Councillors, as corporate parents, were responsible for the welfare of Croydon's looked after young people, and is why safeguarding training was made mandatory for Members.

Councillor Gatland, speaking in favour of the motion, stated that since the publication of the report she had received a large volume of correspondence from concerned residents and professionals. The fact that the authority were found to be putting young people in significant harm should be of great concern. Councillor Gatland asked why Councillor Flemming had returned unspent pupil premium money to the government - money that could have been spent on young people. It was stated that there were many excellent officers in the children's department and they had been let down by the leadership which included the senior management and the lead Members – Councillors Flemming and Newman. The Opposition were willing to help in bringing the service back to where it should have been; Councillor Gatland stated she was sitting on the Improvement Board for this purpose. The Council now faced the possibility of central government taking over the running of the service, and due to the failures identified in the report Councillor Gatland called for Councillor Flemming to step aside and for new leadership.

Councillor Hall, speaking in favour of the amendment, apologised for the failures to young people identified in the Ofsted report. The population and demands in Croydon had grown, but the Council

remained underfunded per head of population, unlike other neighbouring London boroughs. There was a large funding gap for children's services across the country, predicted to reach £2 billion by 2020 by the Local Government Association. Councillor Hall stated that it was therefore no surprise that Ofsted had deemed 70% of inspected authorities as inadequate or requiring improvement. Croydon experienced the additional pressure of a large number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children. From the year 2011/12 to 2014/15 the Council received cuts to funding for children's social care, since that time there had been an increase in the budget due to the administration's control over finances. It was claimed that early in the administration, changes were identified however the assurances Members received were based on inaccurate information. Councillor Hall stated that the administration understood the need for rapid change and a number of initiatives had taken place to address the issues identified by Ofsted. However, in the longer term, central government needed to change its approach to funding in Croydon.

Councillor Creatura, speaking in favour of the motion, stated that calling for senior politicians to resign over the findings in the report was not political, however the amendment submitted by the administration was political. It was claimed that the Leader had blamed officers for the failings in the service, however the report identified senior leaders as being aware of the issues. Councillor Creatura stated that this posed the question of who was actually running the Council; either it was the political leadership, and therefore they were to blame, or it was officers – in which case the Council was not being run by the administration. Councillor Creatura stated that either way, a new leadership was needed. Councillor Creatura called for the Leader to take responsibility for the failures in the report and stand aside.

Councillor Newman, speaking in favour of the amendment, stated that he took his share of the responsibility – as he had done so at the scrutiny meeting the previous week. The Cabinet meeting held prior to the Council meeting highlighted a number of measures being taken to ensure young people were safe. The Opposition, it was claimed, also had to take their share of the responsibility. It was clear that the data being reported to Cabinet was not correct and the previous Chair of the Safeguarding Board considered the service to be in much better shape than Ofsted had found. The key issue was to create a sustainable service, not just short term measures. Croydon had unique pressures on its service and was underfunded by central government – this had to be addressed to create a sustainable service. Councillor Newman stated that this was not just a Croydon issue – it was a national crisis. This, it was stated, reinforced the need to understand and address the mistakes made in Croydon as the system was fragile. Councillor Newman stated that this should not be a political debate, but politics did still matter, and the Leader of the Opposition had been invited to sign a letter to central government requesting more funding for children's services. The safety of children was the administration's overwhelming priority

and all measures would be taken to ensure they were protected.

At the conclusion of the debate the Mayor began by putting the amendment to the vote.

The amendment was **carried**.

The Mayor then put the amended motion to the vote.

The amended motion was **carried**.

A4

Camera Resolution

Not required.

MINUTES - PART B

None

The meeting ended at 8.36pm.