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Council

Meeting held on Monday, 5 July 2021 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Chair);

Councillors Kola Agboola, Jade Appleton, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Mike Bonello, Janet Campbell, Louis Carserides, Richard Chatterjee, Chris Clark, Stuart Collins, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Nina Degrad, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Clive Fraser, Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Humayun Kabir, Stuart King, Ola Kolade, Michael Neal, Ian Parker, Jason Perry, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Andy Stranack, Callton Young, Catherine Wilson, Rowenna Davis, Samir Dwesar, Lara Fish, Amy Foster, Simon Fox, Gayle Gander, Brigitte Graham, Griffiths, Christopher Herman, Mark Johnson, Lee, Llabuti, Enid Mollyneaux, Stella Nabukeera, Tamar Nwafor, Eunice O'Dame, Ria Patel, Tony Pearson, Ellily Ponnuthurai, Holly Ramsey, Reshekaron, Luke Shortland, Srinivasan, Stewart, Sutton, Nikhil Thampi, Adele Benson and Mario Creatura

Apologies: The Mayor, Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury introduced himself as it was his first meeting as Chair. He welcomed new and existing members and reminded colleagues of housekeeping arrangements during the tenure of the meeting.

Members noted a slight amendment to the order of the items and deferral of Item 7. They were informed that minutes from previous meetings were not yet available, however it was anticipated that these would be ready for the next meeting of full Council.

Apologies were noted from Councillors Simon Brew and Badsha Quadir.

PART A

1/21

Disclosure of Interests

There were no disclosures of interest made at the meeting.

At this point, the mayor moved onto Item 14 (i).

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

There was one item of urgent business and members noted the proposal to appoint an Interim Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Hamida Ali was invited to support the proposal which was seconded by Cllr Callton Young OBE.

The recommendation was agreed.

There were no other items of urgent business.

3/21 **Announcements**

Members were informed that Her Honour Judge Alice Robinson (Resident Judge, Croydon Council Crown Court) will be leaving to take a place at Norwich Crown Court. Members acknowledged her contribution to the Council.

Condolences were extended to the parents and friends of the boy recently murdered in the Borough.

The results of the recent Bi-Elections were noted.

- Councillor Kola Agboola was elected to the vacancy in New Addington North.
- Councillor Jade Appleton was elected to the vacancy in Park Hill & Whitgift Ward
- Councillor Mike Bonello was elected to the vacancy in Woodside Ward
- Councillor Louis Carserides was elected to the vacancy in South Norwood Ward
- Councillor Ola Kolade was elected to the vacancy in Kenley Ward.

The five new members were welcomed to their first full Council meeting.

Croydon Question Time

The mayor outlined arrangements for the questions put to Council, reminded colleagues that 30 minutes would be allocated for this item. Members noted questions received in advance of the meeting:

- When will Croydon get their money back (£260million) for Brick-by-Brick?
 - Cllr Ali responded saying that a decision will be made at the Cabinet meeting next week. Recommendations to continue the unfinished work will be made in order to retain the value in relation to the public's investment.
- Parking bays within Purley are taken up by building contractors – what will Croydon do to manage and properly enforce on-street parking rules?
 - Cllr Hamid responded and referred to support by the Council via grant systems. Cllr Muhammad Ali said that illegal parking can be reported immediately, and the service has been to undertake additional patrols to address the concern.
- Has a venue been sourced for the count for the referendum?
 - Cllr Hamida Ali referred to an item later in the report which will discuss the referendum, dealing with the logistics and implementation. The decision of the venue has not yet been made.
- What are the council's guaranteed plans towards gaining public trust after mishandling of funds?
 - Cllr Ali said that she hoped that progress made by the administration in trying to address the issues and the cultural change will give residents confidence that this is a priority. Progress is in hand but more needs to be done.
- There were concerns about unsatisfactory SEND support to a school in Croydon and in particular, regarding the appointment of a non-qualified teacher as Head with no teaching experience. Are the Council concerned that parents feel that they are unable to raise their concerns and what will the Council do about this?
 - Cllr Fleming acknowledged that the Council are aware of this and assured colleagues that all schools are monitored in regard to safeguarding. This is a temporary measure to cover sick leave. Provision of SEND pupils follows a process which is followed.
- Planning permission has been granted for new homes – what provision is being made for extra provision for healthcare, transport and other infrastructure requirements and services once these are built?
 - Cllr Rees responded and agreed to write to the questioner with links and further information on the infrastructure delivery plan.
- Can clarification be given on Planning Department staff shortages and delays and the reasons behind these?
 - Cllr Rees outlined the corporate drive to reduce agency staff which has led

to a reduction of staff, and he referred to challenges around recruitment and retainment. A recruitment drive is currently taking place across all grades – however, this will take time. He asked colleagues to note that demand for planning permission have also increased with an increase to people working from home.

- What is happening around investment in libraries and increase to opening hours?
 - Cllr Rees outlined the consultation underway to make opening times more flexible with late opening at least one day a week.
- The impact on the environment is often ignored – why does Croydon encourage the building of new sites on green areas?
 - Cllr Rees referred to the need for new homes and said that all applications are determined according to planning frameworks and policies. However, changes are being made to try and hear the voices of residents and the Council does endeavour to respect land and find a balance between the appropriate level of development.
- How many homes in Croydon do not have access to food waste collection services?
 - Cllr Ali confirmed that 4500 properties do not have access, and these are all flats above shop properties, and it is hoped that this will be resolved. Members noted mandatory requirements for collection of food waste.

At this point, a motion was moved by Cllr Fitzpatrick for an extension to the meeting of 20 minutes to ensure proper consideration of Council Business. This was seconded by Cllr Jade Appleton and agreed by Council members.

Leader of the Council, Cllr Hamida Ali informed colleagues of recent meetings with clinical staff and work with the NHS on the vaccination rollout.

Members were invited to raise any questions. They raised concerns about the administration and leadership of the council in the past. Discussion continued around current issues and the challenges faced, together with proposals in place in order to secure and deliver a better future for the borough.

Members heard about work being done to ensure delivery of the best services possible for the council's residents as a priority for the council, including capital investment in libraries within the borough. Revenue challenges were discussed, and Cllr Lewis outlined options for delivery. Residents were reminded of current consultations and encouraged to participate.

Colleagues went on to discuss implications around disuse of hybrid meetings and the lost retention of opportunities for members who were unable to attend meetings in person, to exercise their proper role. Discussion also took place with regards to loss of communal spaces and constructive collaboration with residents to find ways forward to replace these. Concerns were also raised

regarding the management of Brick-by-Brick and the Leader reminded colleagues that this would be further discussed at the upcoming Cabinet meeting.

Members heard about upcoming summer programmes for children across the borough, the Legacy Youth Zone and the results of the recent Ofsted inspection.

Colleagues commended the work of NHS workers and noted arrangements for the new Health and Wellbeing Space.

Further questions were raised with regards to the increase in cost to the Council for refurbishment of Fairfield Hall and other issues around capital delivery. Cllr Lewis reminded colleagues of the importance in investment as an integral part of the council landscape and contribution to the Borough of Culture in 2023.

Cllr Fleming was asked for an update on retrieval of costs around unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. Members received a summary of the sums involved and conversations between senior officers and the Home Office Minister to ensure that the council is receiving the right level of recompense. They were assured that this will remain at the forefront of discussion and updates will be provided regularly, particularly around the funding gap for the care-leaving population.

In discussion, members raised further concerns as follow:

- They felt that items that should have gone to Committee had not.
- Issues around audio and visual difficulties in accessibility of this meeting.
- Regular examination of public health and integrated care plans need to be in place.

5/21

Member Petitions

The Council received notice of petitions presented by Members on behalf of local residents.

The mayor invited Cllrs Hay-Justice, Shahul-Hameed and Ali to put forward their petitions.

Members heard from Cllr Hay-Justice, who referred to the following:

- Disappointment that the Govt had chosen not to grant the landlord licence to the Borough.
- The news that 90 new homes will be welcomed.
- Award to the borough of the largest rough-sleeping grant.

Cllr Shahul-Hameed made the following points:

- A survey is under way in preparation for the Home Office' Safer Streets Fund and the bid will be submitted this week.
- On supporting businesses, the Croydon division of the SE London Chamber was sufficiently launched with the aim for becoming a voice for local businesses.
- Croydon Council has become one of the first councils in the country to urge residents to unite in its Race Matters and Equality pledges.

Members then heard from Cllr Muhammad Ali, who said:

- It is important that support is in place for local govt in combatting Climate Change and fund schemes. Residents are encouraged to contribute to consultations and surveys.

The mayor took the opportunity to ask members to be concise in their responses in light of the time allowed.

Discussion continued on several issues, and other petitions were raised to include:

- Maintenance of cemeteries and neglect of council services with regards to its green spaces.
- The need to streamline services and delivery rates according to agreed schedules.
- Provision of services and affordable new homes and initiatives in place, to address outstanding issues and failings.
- Investigations into public health statutory notices.
- Work with landlords around informing them of their statutory requirements.
- The unsustainable steep rise in costs for temporary accommodation and ways in which this will be addressed.
- How assessments have been made to address demand on housing and what provisions are being considered.
- Inspection of properties and stock condition surveys to ensure that they are fully habitable.
- Residents' concerns over existing housing issues.
- Fuel poverty and its effects on residents.
- Considerable savings through the in-year review of the Council's capital spending programme and reduction of the council's borrowing.

- The cost of COVID to the Borough in terms of loss of life of residents and significant financial loss to the council.
- The quality of the submission to the Secretary of State (SoS) for the Landlords Licensing Scheme.
- The decision of the SoS on the council's submission and the financial impact of this loss of income (around £2.5million), including subsequent impact on other services.
- Balancing the Council's budget.
- Re-structuring of senior officer roles and the review of procurement governance, with an indication of the timescale expected and the scale of savings sought.
- Evidence on the council's delivery and restoration of confidence around better control of its finances.
- The key risks of not making the savings needed to balance the budget.
- Financial losses to the Council on sales of its assets, such as that of the Croydon Park Hotel.
- The introduction of speed limits, compliance and enforcement and its effect on safety in residential areas.
- The petition to re-consider plans to dispose of Grange Park lodge and the lack of alternative measures.

Colleagues were assured that work is underway to address these issues and were updated on procedures in place. Members were reminded that Capital disposals have to be agreed by Council and confirmation was received that no monies were held for forwarding licensing schemes. Members recognised challenges for vulnerable residents and the importance of central government support.

6/21 **Maiden Speeches**

It was agreed to defer maiden speeches by newly elected members until the next full council meeting in October, due to the high volume of business on the agenda at this time.

Congratulations were extended to the five new members, Councillors Kola Agboola, Jade Appleton, Mike Bonello, Louis Carserides, and Ola Kolade.

7/21 **Council Debate Motions**

There were no Motions for debate at this time.

Annual Reports

The Council received Annual Reports for 2020-21 for Scrutiny and Overview Committee and General Purposes and Audit Committee.

Respective Chairs were invited to introduce their reports and Members heard from Cllr Fitzsimons and Cllr Jewett.

Members were then invited to put their questions to the respective Chairs.

In the subsequent discussion around the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Annual Report, colleagues asked for clarity on the following points:

- What has been done to improve demonstration of greater rigor in challenging underlying assumptions before approving the budget?
 - Cllr Fitzsimons acknowledged greater support and increased focus on access to information and financial sustainability. Detailed financial reports are examined regularly and lessons have been learned, particularly around risk assurance and being held to account.
- With reference to the Croydon Renewal Plan and ongoing structural, cultural and financial challenges, how has progress on the Plan been monitored and scrutinised?
 - Cllr Fitzsimons outlined separate actions within the Plan to include aspects of the Croydon Scrutiny Review which has been taken to individual scrutiny panels. A more robust approach is needed to make sure that the correct information is in place and the Plan will continue to be reviewed. Any concerns can be raised by Cabinet and all councillors. Members were recommended to read the scrutiny papers and direct any concerns to their contact on the Panel at any time.
- What evidence is there of change since the non-statutory review criticised Scrutiny for not referring key decisions back for consideration of full Council?
 - Cllr Fitzsimons outlined a change of approach since the review was made. He assured colleagues that monitoring had been improved, and that the Scrutiny Panel would not hesitate to raise any concerns about the budgetary framework, with full Council.

The mayor invited Cllr Karen Jewitt in her capacity as Chair of the General Purposes and Audit Committee, to provide an introduction to the report.

In the subsequent discussion around the General Purposes and Audit Committee Annual Report, colleagues asked for clarity on the following points:

- Concerns about previous assessments on the work of the Committee and the decision to assign a new independent Chair.
 - Cllr Jewitt said that there had been great improvement since then and feedback has been positive. Members were reassured that all assistance will be given to the new Chair.
- How has the work on the budget helped other departments in putting in recommendations to help the financial journey of the Authority?
 - The response was that there was now a greater understanding of the budget and risks and better scrutiny existed overall.
- On the subject of internal audit, a number of priority 1 tasks still remain outstanding – how is this improving?
 - Cllr Jewitt acknowledged that there had been a slow response but that things were improving. She agreed that a greater understanding and involvement of the work of the Committee was needed by councillors.

9/21 **Governance Model Referendum**

The Council received the report of the Executive Director of Resources and Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Katherine Kerswell, Chief Executive outlined the report and recommendations.

Members noted Appendix 2 in particular, which states:

The Council is required to publish a notice of proposals by 20 July which set out the basis on which it proposes to operate the Mayoral model if a majority votes in favour of moving to that model at the referendum in October.

Ms Kerswell informed colleagues that proposals will be published on the website.

The Leader, Cllr Ali proposed the recommendations and Deputy Leader, Cllr King seconded.

The recommendation was agreed by Council members.

10/21 **Transformation Funding Strategy & 2021/22 Usage**

Members received the report of the Executive Director of Resources and the Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Colleagues were invited to raise any questions and asked for clarity on the following:

- What were the findings of the report under Recommendation 3, relating to the previous use of transformation funding and will these be available publicly?
- Cllr King said that the principle finding will be presented to Cabinet next week. He agreed to take forward the query about publication of the report with relevant officers.
- The report referred to the council's previous failings – is the strategy now sufficiently rigorous?
- In his response, Cllr King assured colleagues that the new strategy sets a very clear budget with specific detail and a marked improvement with the development of a business case and approval as well as presentation to the council. Members were assured that it was felt that this is sufficiently robust and transparent. An annual report will also be presented, and accountability will be vital.

The item was moved to a vote at this point and recommendations were agreed.

11/21 **Constitutional Changes**

Members received the report of the Executive Director of Resources and the Interim Deputy Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Hamida Ali proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr King.

Members agreed the recommendation.

12/21 **Use of Special Urgency for Key Decisions 2020/21 Annual Report**

Members received the Annual Report detailing the cases where Special Urgency has been used during the 2020/21 municipal year.

Cllr Hamida Ali proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr King.

The recommendation was agreed.

Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision

The mayor asked members to consider the recommendations since the last ordinary Council meeting related to the following matters:

i). Appointment to the role of Chief Executive, Head of Paid Service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer

Cllr Hamida Ali introduced the report, summarising achievements and demonstrations of commitment to resolving issues faced by the Council. The work of the interim Chief Executive, Katherine Kerswell was commended.

Cllr Ali proposed the recommendation to appoint Katherine Kerswell as Croydon's new Chief Executive and the proposal was seconded by Cllr Jason Perry.

The recommendation was agreed.

ii). School Admission Arrangements

Cllr Fleming outlined details of the new school admissions code and asked members to note the changes to Croydon's school admission arrangements.

Cllr Fleming proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr Maddie Henson.

The recommendation was agreed.

iii). Report in the Public Interest – Quarter 1 Update

Cllr Hamida Ali outlined the report which demonstrated progress since the last quarter, and provided assurance that actions reported have been fully delivered.

Cllr Ali proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr King.

The recommendation was agreed.

iv). Organisational Redesign of Croydon Council – Response to the Consultation

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The mayor asked members to note minor amendments as follow:

- Recommendation 14 – referrals to paragraphs should read 5.21 or 5.29 – *not* 5.18 or 5.25
- Recommendation 16 – referrals to paragraphs should read 15 – *not* 16

Cllr Ali immediately moved to propose the recommendation, and this was seconded by Cllr Young.

The recommendations were agreed.

14/21 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This was not needed.

The mayor thanked everyone for their contribution and support.

The meeting was closed.

The meeting ended at 10.20 pm

Signed:

Date:

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