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Council

MINUTES of the **ANNUAL MEETING** of the **COUNCIL** held on Wednesday, 25 May 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

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

Apologies: Deputy Civic Mayor Felicity Flynn and Councillors Jeet Bains and Richard Chatterjee.

PART A

1/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none, however, Members were reminded of the need to complete a new Declaration of Interest form within 28 days of the 5 May 2022 elections.

It was noted, to date, that just over half of the Members of the Council had completed a new form and the Civic Mayor requested that all Councillors who were still to submit their form, did so, as soon as possible.

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

There were no items of urgent business.

3/21 **Election of Civic Mayor (Chair of Council) 2022/2023**

On the proposition by Executive Mayor Jason Perry, seconded by Councillor Stuart King, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** that Councillor Alisa Flemming be elected as Civic Mayor of the London Borough of Croydon for the Municipal Year 2022-2023.

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming then read aloud, and signed, the declaration of acceptance of office.

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming offered a vote of thanks to Honorary Alderman John Wentworth, whom she had nominated to be her main Civic Mayor's Consort for the Municipal Year 2022-2023, and that he would be supported by two of her consorts who were in attendance (her uncle, Norman Flemming and her brother, Owen Flemming).

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming then said that it had given her great pleasure to present a badge and citation to the previous Civic Mayor, Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury and to his Mayoress, Rahima Chowdhury, the past consort's badge.

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming said she was also delighted to award the sealed citations to former Civic Mayor, Councillors Humayan Kabir and former Madam Civic Mayor, Councillor Maddie Henson. She went on to thank both for their service during what had been a very difficult time in terms of Covid-19 and the way in which they had been able to carry out their duties.

Madam Civic Mayor then offered a vote of thanks again, to her consort, John Wentworth, in advance of what she thought would be an eventful and blessed year and she was looking forward to spending more time with him as they visited residents across the Borough.

Madam Civic Mayor then offered a vote of thanks to the Deputy Civic Mayor elect, Councillor Sue Bennett, and recognised her contributions to the Council's scrutiny function and, in particular to those services which targeted children and young people.

Madam Civic Mayor then said thank you to the following:

- Former Councillor Pat Ryan who had worked tirelessly with her after the election in 2006 to ensure that she was elected, and she said she was for ever grateful to him for his years of support and advice.
- Former ward colleague, Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury, for the support he had given to many in the Borough during his year in office.
- Colleagues from both sides of the Council Chamber for their years of support and their collective commitment to public service.
- Her children and siblings who were present at the meeting.
- Her current mentor, Lord Woolley, and Baroness Willcox of Newport.

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming announced the following organisations as her nominated Civic Mayor Charities for the Municipal Year 2022-2023:

1. The African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust (ACLT); and

2. The Sickle Cell Trust.

In respect of a further two charities to be supported, Madam Civic Mayor Flemming said that one would be to support children and young people and that a message would be sent out to the Borough's children and young people to ask them to come forward to decide who they would like the Civic Mayor to choose to support, which she said, fitted well within the spirit of her "choose your future" slogan and campaigns. She said that she was looking forward to hearing from them and reporting back to the Chamber on the outcome of the responses received.

4/21 **Election of Deputy-Civic Mayor (Vice-Chair of Council) 2022/23**

On the proposition by Councillor Stuart King, seconded by Executive Mayor Jason Perry, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** that Councillor Sue Bennett be elected Deputy Civic Mayor of the London Borough of Croydon for the Municipal Year 2022-2023.

Deputy Civic Mayor Bennett then read aloud, and signed, the declaration of acceptance of office.

5/21 **Returning Officer Announcements**

Katherine Kerswell, the Council's Head of Paid Service and Returning Officer at the Borough's Elected Executive Mayor and Council Elections held on 5 May 2022, announced that elections had been held in twenty-eight wards for all seventy councillors in Croydon and for Croydon's elected Executive Mayor.

She said that, as Members would be aware, the elections had returned 34 Labour Councillors, 32 Conservative Councillors, two Green Councillors and one Liberal Democrat Councillor.

There was, she said, one Councillor vacancy in South Croydon Ward, for which a by-election would be held on 30 June 2022.

In conclusion, she said that, in the historic first vote for a directly elected Mayor for Croydon, Jason Perry was returned as the winning candidate, and he would serve a four-year term until May 2026.

6/21 **Statement from the Executive Mayor - Outlining Priorities for the Year Ahead**

The Borough's first elected Executive Mayor, Jason Perry, congratulated the elected Civic Mayor on her election and said that he was looking forward to working with her over the coming year.

He said he wanted to start by thanking the Returning Officer and all the Council staff who had worked tirelessly to deliver the elections three weeks ago. He said that, while the count had clearly taken longer than anyone had anticipated, the election was a historic moment for Croydon, and although

close, all sides had agreed that the integrity and accuracy of the result was without doubt.

Executive Mayor Perry said that to be sure lessons that were learned from the Borough's first Mayoral election, he had asked the Chief Executive to commission an independent review of the election arrangements and count and was very pleased to have heard that this was already underway and he would ensure this was reported back to Full Council when it was complete.

Executive Mayor Perry said that next month's by-election would be the first test and while the vacancy was a normal part of the Borough's democratic process, he had asked for his mayoral salary to be reduced this year to cover the costs of running the by-election.

Executive Mayor Perry then went on to say that, like the referendum last year, the result of May's election had sent a clear message that residents wanted change, with the election of the Borough's first Green Party Councillors, the return of a Liberal Democrat Councillor after a period of absence and his election as Croydon's first Executive Mayor, a Conservative Executive Mayor. Change was, he said, what the Borough's residents wanted, and change was what its residents would see in the coming years.

He said that the Executive Mayoralty was a new start for Croydon, a much-needed chance to hit the reset button and to move on from the years of negative headlines and scandals that had blighted the borough. This evening, he said, he wanted to set out the initial priorities for his administration to begin that change.

Executive Mayor Perry also spoke about the change he hoped Members could collectively make to the often fraught and divisive political culture seen over recent years. He said that when he first became a councillor, and for many years following, the Council had a consensus. He acknowledged there had been political theatre in the Chamber, but outside of the Chamber was where the constructive and collaborative work between parties to improve Croydon's communities took place. He said that that was not a culture more recently elected Councillors would have experienced but it was important for Croydon that it returned to a place of mutual respect for one another as it was what the residents wanted to see and had often been called for on the campaign trail.

He added that residents wanted to see the parties cooperating for the benefit of Croydon and had already met with each of the parties – Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat – and, as Executive Mayor that was a dialogue he would continue to have over his four years in Office. Executive Mayor Perry said that he would maintain an open-door for all Councillors and after the summer, he would begin arranging a rolling programme of meetings with groups of Councillors to discuss the major issues in their wards and what the Council could do to improve their wards and the Borough.

Executive Mayor Perry said he would reintroduce estate walkabouts, led by the Deputy Executive Mayor and Cabinet Member for Homes, Councillor Hale, to give Councillors an opportunity to raise areas of improvement and to help prevent the kind of neglect which had led to the conditions in Regina Road going unchallenged for so long.

Tonight, he said, he hoped the Council would collectively deliver another of his manifesto pledges and finally appoint a Chair of the Scrutiny Committee from an opposition party and he wished Councillor Rowena Davis well in her new role.

Executive Mayor Perry said that strong scrutiny made the decisions the Council made better, and he welcomed that critical challenge from members across the chamber. Indeed, he said, he hoped to discuss options for a greater role for pre-decision scrutiny once the new Chair was formally elected.

Executive Mayor Perry said he also wanted to build a bigger role for residents in the Council's decision-making, learning from best practice to develop wider pre-decision engagement with local people, a Community Cabinet or something similar, to provide feedback on proposals before final decisions were made.

It was, he said, these changes to how business was done in this Council that would slowly rebuild trust in Croydon's politics by opening up decision-making, working cross party and having independent Scrutiny and challenge.

Obviously, a key part of rebuilding trust is delivering on the Administration's promises.

Executive Mayor Perry said that his priorities were clear and at June and July's Cabinet meetings, the Administration would be taking the first steps to deliver the lasting change Croydon needed to see in order to rebuild residents' pride in the Borough.

Executive Mayor Perry announced that the Council would reform its planning policies to prioritise design and stop forcing inappropriate and unwanted developments upon our communities. He said he had already begun the process of revoking the Planning Design Guide, SPD2, which was effectively a developers' blueprint and allowed unsightly and unsuitable developments across the Borough. He added that a review of the Local Plan would also follow.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would get the regeneration of Croydon's town centre back on track by working with partners like Westfield and Hammerson to re-energise the town centre and not by way of long policies and empty strategies but real action to improve Croydon, supporting local businesses and driving inward investment. He said he had already met with Westfield and Hammerson to begin this work and hoped to have positive news to announce in the very near future. It was, he said, this new investment that would create a destination for shopping, leisure, employment,

education and culture, including putting Fairfield Halls back at the centre of Croydon's local offer. He confirmed that the Council would work with its district centres to ensure they had the tools to flourish and grow.

Executive Mayor Perry announced that the Council would reopen Purley Pool. He said that Purley would get its pool and leisure centre back. He acknowledged that this may take a little time but said it would breathe life back into the heart of Purley and it would allow schools to teach children to swim again, disability groups to thrive and charities to fund raise once again.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would clean up the Borough, which would deliver on his manifesto pledge to reinstate a graffiti removal service, increase grass-cutting and tidy up Croydon's streets to once again make Croydon a place where people felt proud to live. He said he had asked officers to focus grass cutting activity around known Jubilee events next week so that the Borough looked its best in order that residents could celebrate in style. He acknowledged that the Council must start to mend the many broken windows in the Borough since a borough that looked like no one cared, would continue to decline and the Council could not allow that to happen.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would tackle knife and violent crime and recognised that the tragic loss of five young lives last year was a tragedy. He said the Council would work with the police to make the Borough's streets safe again and Public Space Protection Orders would be reintroduced in Croydon town Centre and New Addington and would work with the Borough's schools and communities to tackle youth violence in the Borough.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would also promote, recognise and celebrate the positive contribution of so many of the Borough's young people to its society. He said that, only today, the Council had launched the George Floyd Race Matters Pledge and the Borough's young performers and contributors were outstanding. He said that Croydon had talent.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would end the scandal of Croydon being a slum landlord and recognised that the atrocious conditions laid bare at Regina Road had brought shame to the Borough. Sadly, he said, over a year later, residents were still living in sub-standard homes. He said the Council would increase the pace of work to ensure standards across all its properties were improved and would work with residents to develop a plan for the long-term future of Regina Road. It would, he said, take time to reverse, but his administration would give the Borough's housing tenants back their dignity. He said that the culture of ignoring the Borough's tenants must change and the Council would enshrine its commitment to a new culture in a new Tenants' Charter, valuing its Council tenants, its customers, and giving them the responsive service, they needed and the respect they deserved.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would protect the most vulnerable in the Borough's communities and would continue to invest the majority of its funding in services for vulnerable Adults and Children and

ensuring those who often had the least were protected from the impact of savings and service changes wherever possible.

Executive Mayor Perry recognised that none of this would be possible unless the Council got a grip on its finances. He said that fixing the bankruptcy of the previous Administration would mean taking tough decisions to make the Council financially sustainable for the future. He went on to say that, whilst the Budget agreed by the previous Administration only two months ago was balanced, holes were already emerging, which would need significant work and the Council still had very clear challenges ahead around Brick-by-Brick, Croydon Affordable Homes and parking income to name but a few.

Executive Mayor Perry said that, with the Council still being reliant on Government support to stay afloat, significant savings were still needed in coming years. Financial discipline, he said, had to be a top priority not just for Cabinet but for every Member of this Council. He said that the Council must achieve this through the transformation of its services working with its communities.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the Council would once again be one which listened to Croydon. He said he would instil a new culture in the Council where its residents would no longer be treated as a nuisance but respected and that the Council would listen to their needs.

As Executive Mayor, he said he would be out and about across the whole Borough, Cabinet roadshows would return, and he would be holding face-to-face advice surgeries for the Borough's residents. The Council must, he said, be accessible and accountable to its residents since he and Councillors had been elected to serve them.

Executive Mayor Perry said that the agenda he had set out today was a response to the needs of the Borough's residents and was the practical and positive change Croydon's community needed to see.

In conclusion, Executive Mayor Perry said that this was a time of change for Croydon and a new start for the Council at the beginning of the journey to restore the fortunes of its great borough and make everyone proud of the place they called home. He said that the election campaign had highlighted the strengths and diversity of the Borough's communities. As Executive Mayor, he said he wanted to end the years of division and to harness all the talents and voices of the Borough. Together, he said, everyone was stronger and together the change everyone knew Croydon needed, could be delivered.

Executive Mayor Perry said he looked forward to working with everyone to achieve that change.

Madam Civic Mayor Flemming invited the Leader of the Opposition Group, Councillor Stuart King, to respond.

Councillor King began by congratulating Madam Civic Mayor Flemming and Madam Deputy Mayor Bennett on their election to Office this evening.

Councillor King then extended his congratulations to Executive Mayor Jason Perry on his election as the Borough's first directly elected Mayor and said that, as a lifelong Croydonian, no-one would doubt his commitment.

Councillor King said it was right that everybody, regardless of political party, acknowledged that and the significance of his election and the promise of better times, which half of the Members agreed could herald better times for its residents but that the proof would be in the pudding.

Councillor King said that returning Members in the Chamber might recall that he had spoken in the debate on the outcome of the referendum, which had led to the creation of the Executive Mayor's post and in his speech he had said that the Council should be trying to ensure that the mayoral system flourished and succeeded, not just because Croydon voted for it but because its success, the Executive Mayor's success, would be the Town's success. He said that he still stood by this today. He said he thought it was an ambition that all Members and guests here today could all unite around and that whilst he might regret that his party's candidate was unable to secure a victory, he was, nonetheless, both hopeful and determined that the mayoral system would deliver for Croydon, its businesses, and its residents.

Councillor King said he thought it was fair to say that there were some concerns that residents and others had about how mayoral systems could operate and, in particular, the potential for a concentration of power in one pair of hands at the expense of all the other elected Councillors, regardless of political party.

With regard to the Executive Mayor's priorities, Councillor King said that much of this would be welcomed by Councillors and residents, including the independent review of the election count; his generous offer to forego some of his salary to meet the cost of the upcoming by-election; estate walkabouts and proposals to work with Members to enhance the role of scrutiny were all important steps which he thought all Members could agree on as ways forward for this Council.

Councillor King also welcomed the Executive mayor's announcement to review SPD2 Design Guide. He said that the Labour Group Councillors would play an active role and support amendments to this policy to make it more acceptable to Croydon's residents.

Councillor King said the Opposition Group welcomed the opportunity to act responsibly and constructively with the Executive Mayor as he sought to continue the efforts of the Council to tackle the scourge of knife crime and he looked forward to hearing how the Opposition group could play an active role in supporting him in that endeavour.

Councillor King said he did not think that some of the concerns he had expressed would necessarily be restricted to his own party and he welcomed the new representatives from the Green and Liberal Democrat parties, as well as any other Members in the Chamber who had similar concerns. He said that all Members had a mandate that brought them to serve on Croydon Council. The Executive Mayor, he said, had a slightly larger mandate than most but recognised it was a very important one and he hoped that the Executive Mayor and his party colleagues would recognise that the election result was very close and ensure that, as an authority, the four parties represented on the Council could work constructively and effectively together.

Councillor King said that he welcomed Executive Mayor Perry's indication that he wished to lead an authority where the political culture would change from the one many Members had found to be insidious over the past eight years and he very much looked forward to trying to play his part as the leader of the opposition to support that change.

In conclusion, Councillor King said that he wished Executive mayor Perry all the best as he took on his role on behalf of all of the Opposition Group.

7/21

Political Balance of Council and Composition of Committees

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Executive Mayor Jason Perry and seconded by Councillor Stuart King. These were put to the vote and passed unanimously.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that Council **AGREE** the following recommendations in the report:

1. Note that there were 34 Labour Group Members; 33 Conservative Group Members (including the Executive Mayor); 2 Green Group Members and 1 Liberal Democrat Member.
2. Note that there was one vacancy on the Council and a by-election would be held next month.
3. Agree the size of committees and the allocation of seats on committees in accordance with the principles set out in this report.
4. Subject to 3, authorise the Monitoring Officer to amend the Constitution to reflect the increase in the size of the Appeals and Civic Mayoralty and Honorary Freedom Selection Committees.

8/21

Appointments

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Executive Mayor Jason Perry subject (1) to Councillor Ellily Ponnuthurai being nominated to the two vacant seats on the Fostering Panel and the Croydon Almshouses – Relief in Need Charities; and (2) Councillor Margaret Bird being the employer

representative on the Pensions Board. This was seconded by Councillor Stuart King. These were put to the vote and passed unanimously.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that:

1. Where the political balance rules applied, appointments to those Committees giving effect to the wishes of the relevant political groups, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
2. The reviewed membership of the Health and Well-being Board, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved;
3. Appointments to other Committees, Panels, Working Groups and Outside Bodies, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, be approved;
4. The suspension of paragraph 2.3 of the Non-Executive Procedure Rules (Part 4F of the Constitution) for the 2022/2023 Municipal Year, be approved;
5. That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs and substitutes to those non-Executive Committees, detailed in Appendix 1, be approved (this is without prejudice to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.4 of Part 4F of the Constitution which would continue to apply enabling in year vacancies to either the Chair or Vice Chair to be filled by election at the first meeting of the relevant committee or sub-committee following notification to the Monitoring Officer);
6. The following executive appointments made under the directly elected Mayor and Cabinet decision-making framework, be noted:
 - i) The appointments of Cabinet Members, Cabinet Committees and Deputy Cabinet Members (Appendix 1);
 - ii) The appointments to Joint Committees as appropriate (Appendix 1);
 - iii) The appointments to London Councils' Committees (as appropriate) and Panels and Local Government Association bodies (Appendix 2);
7. The following appointments be noted:
 - i) The appointments by the Elected Mayor to those outside bodies, which relate to the exercise of an executive function (marked (*)), as detailed in Appendix 2;
 - ii) The appointments of Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet (Appendix 1); and
 - iii) The appointments of political party group officers (Appendix 1); and

8. The Monitoring Officer be authorised to update the Constitution in respect of decisions arising from this report.

9/21 **Executive Mayor's Scheme of Delegations**

The Executive Mayor's Scheme of Delegations was proposed by the Executive Mayor Jason Perry and seconded by Deputy Executive Mayor, Councillor Lynne Hale. These were put to the vote and passed.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that Council **NOTE** the Executive Mayor's Scheme of Delegations.

10/21 **Members' Scheme of Allowances**

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Councillor Stuart King - subject to an additional recommendation to reduce the number of the Shadow Cabinet Member roles from seven to six and add the allowance for this deleted role to that of the existing amount for Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and in doing so change the allowance for Deputy Leader of the Opposition so that it was payable to up to two councillors at a rate of £6,567.60 per annum each - and duly seconded. These were put to the vote and passed unanimously.

Accordingly, it was **RESOLVED** that Council **AGREE** the recommendations in the report:

1. To approve the proposed amendments detailed in paragraph 2 of the report with effect from 9 May 2022 (if applicable);
2. Subject to recommendation 1, to authorise the Monitoring Officer to comply with the necessary statutory publicity requirements in respect of the approval of the revised Members' Allowance Scheme; and
3. That the Monitoring Officer be authorised to make all necessary updates to the Constitution.

11/21 **Annual Report of the General Purposes and Audit Committee (GPAC)**

Dr Olu Olasode, Independent Chair to the former General Purposes and Audit Committee, presented the Annual Report of the Committee for 2021/2022.

The report highlighted the work of the Committee over the last year as provided within the Committee's 'Terms of Reference and Scope of Work'. It also included a brief forward look into the year ahead on the Committee's work and developments.

The report also acknowledged the officers, external auditors, cabinet members, other committee chairs, professional advisers and members of the General Purposes and Audit Committee for their input and support to the work of the Committee.

Dr Olasode then responded to questions by members.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

Signed:

Date:

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