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Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 23 March 2022 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Chair);
Councillor Felicity Flynn (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Kola Agboola, Hamida Ali, Muhammad Ali, Jade Appleton,
Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Mike Bonello,
Simon Brew, Alison Butler, Jan Buttinger, Janet Campbell, Robert Canning,
Louis Carserides, Richard Chatterjee, Luke Clancy, Chris Clark, Pat Clouder,
Stuart Collins, Mary Croos, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings,
Mario Creatura, Nina Degrads, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Clive Fraser,
Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson,
Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Bernadette Khan, Shafi Khan,
Stuart King, Ola Kolade, Toni Letts, Oliver Lewis, Stephen Mann,
Stuart Millson, Michael Neal, Oni Oviri, Ian Parker, Andrew Pelling,
Jason Perry, Helen Pollard, Tim Pollard, Joy Prince, Badsha Quadir,
Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Pat Ryan, Manju Shahul-Hameed,
Caragh Skipper, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Robert Ward, David Wood,
Louisa Woodley and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Jamie Audsley, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Simon Hoar and Humayun Kabir

PART A

8/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

9/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

10/21 **Announcements**

Before the start of the meeting for the benefit of residents watching at home, The Mayor explained that only Councillors present in the Council Chamber were able to vote at this meeting. Members attending remotely were able to ask and answer questions, and to speak during debates. Seats in the

Chamber had been allocated to the two political groups based upon the total number of seats they held on the council overall.

The Mayor

In his announcements the Mayor started by inviting all Councillors to the annual Mayoral charity Gala dinner. This would take place on Thursday 31 March at the Grand Sapphire Hotel. Anyone wishing to attend was asked to contact the Mayor's office.

The Mayor also reminded all Members that an event to mark Bangladesh Independence day was taking place on 31 March at 12.30 pm in the Town Hall.

The Leader

The Mayor invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali, to make her announcements.

The Leader confirmed that she would not be standing as a candidate in the forthcoming elections and took the opportunity to thank the people and community groups in Woodside whom she had worked with over the last eight years.

The Leader also thanked her Cabinet and Group colleagues for their support and challenge over her time as the Leader as well as the staff who had worked collaboratively to deliver the budget savings required.

The Chief Executive

The Mayor invited the Chief Executive, Katherine Kerswell, in her capacity as Head of Paid Service, to make her announcements.

The Chief Executive informed Members that this was the Interim Monitoring Officer, John Jones's, last meeting and that he would be leaving Croydon Council on 31 March. She thanked John for everything that he had done over the last six months.

The Chief Executive confirmed that Andrew Hunkin would take on the role of Interim Monitoring Officer and that the recruitment process for appointing a new permanent Monitoring Officer was underway.

The Chief Executive also informed Members that earlier in March Justin Hunt was appointed as the Interim Director of Tenancy Services.

11/21 **Croydon Question Time**

The Mayor explained that Croydon Question Time would be taken in two parts.

The first part was public questions to the Leader and Cabinet, which was followed by questions from Members to the Leader and Cabinet. Wherever possible, the Cabinet Member provided an answer during the meeting, but if a question required detail that the Cabinet Member did not have with them then a written response would be published on the Council website within the following three weeks.

Public Questions

There were 30 minutes allocated to public questions, firstly from those who were in attendance and had emailed in their questions in advance.

The first question was from Mark Samuel:

“As a licenced radio amateur and to celebrate the love and affection of Her Majesty the Queen’s Jubilee would she agree to lend her written support to Ofcom for use of a special call sign within Croydon particularly all the green and open spaces. Could she also ask the Leader of the Opposition to do the same. ”

In her response the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali stated that the Platinum Jubilee was an opportunity to celebrate lifelong service across the Commonwealth and outlined some of the events that had already taken place.

The Leader continued by stating that Ofcom had already given their support to having dedicated call signs but that she was very happy to lend her support to Mr Samuel for a call sign for use in Croydon.

In his supplementary question Mr Samuel asked:

“Would you be able to confirm that the Queen’s Gardens would be open sometime this year, as I visited this afternoon and they were still closed and being one of the principle parks in this area that would be a superb location to air a special call sign that I will be applying for. Thank you for undertaking your research into call signs but I am just hoping that the Queen’s Gardens will be open as I was told that they won’t be open until after the elections in

three (sic) months' time because of storage space. So if you could assist with that I would be very grateful."

In her response, the Leader confirmed that she would ask when the Queen's Gardens would reopen and get back to Mr Samuel and that the Platinum Jubilee weekend would be after the election.

The next question was from Tony Pearson:

"Will the Leader outline the plans that have been made to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty, the Queen?"

In her response, the Leader confirmed that street parties would be facilitated and the usual fees were being waived to enable as many communities as possible to celebrate in the ways that they wished.

In his supplementary question Mr Pearson asked whether the Leader agreed that the only way this Jubilee would be celebrated in Croydon was for this morally bankrupt authority to be replaced by a Conservative administration and Conservative Mayor.

In her response, the Leader stated that she had hoped that this would have been a genuine question about this important civic event, and that it was rather unseemly to be politicising Her Majesty's role.

The next question was from Amy Foster.

"My children attend Oasis Academy Ryelands in Oakley Road, South Norwood. I have been very impressed by how the school students and their teachers have encouraged active travel within their community, surveying their peers on how they get to school, creating a video as part of the COP26 Conference here in Croydon. However, what has made the true difference is the School Streets Scheme which has removed excess traffic from outside the school. Could the Cabinet Member please confirm when the School Streets Scheme will be returned to opening in Sandown Road so that the students and their parents can get to school safely?"

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali was pleased to announce that the Traffic Management Advisory Committee unanimously agreed to reintroduce the ten schemes that were temporarily suspended. In addition the council had received funding to introduce two additional School Streets which would be put in place subject to consultation after May this year and further funding had been received for ten more from Transport for London (TfL), subject to

consultation. Any school that wished to be considered should contact the council.

The next question was from Kofi Frimpong.

“As this Labour council is about to make cuts of £470,000 to street lighting what provisions are being made to ensure that hotbeds of crime such as Norbury Avenue, Green Lane and Georgia Road are safe at night to walk through?”

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that one of the council's top priorities was to keep communities safe and the lighting upgrade completed in 2016 led to improved safety. Councillor Ali confirmed that in January this year a new lighting regime was introduced which had not led to an increase in crime levels and any areas where CCTV cameras were present would remain at 100% functionality. The results of this trial would be discussed at a future Cabinet meeting.

In his supplementary question Mr Frimpong stated that back in November he had been informed that light levels at a particular junction were below guidance levels, and asked whether the guidance on light levels were no longer suitable and whether the council would be consulting residents after the trial period.

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali confirmed that all changes in light levels were within the British guidance and confirmed that any future changes to this policy would be consulted on.

The next question was from Sangeeta Gobidaas.

“Asking the Cabinet Member for Homes now that we are nearing the one year anniversary of the Regina Road housing airing, what actions have been taken by the council to improve the lives of residents since last year?”

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that the one year on report had been discussed at great length and she summarised the improvements that had been made including greater engagement with residents and structural surveys.

In her supplementary question Ms Gobidaas asked what the Cabinet's future plans were for improving the lives of residents.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that the Improvement Plan would ensure that improvements were ongoing.

The next question was from Simon Fox.

“Why have residents in supported living blocks and council homes in Waddon been so neglected and unable to get answers from the Labour councillors and Labour council to fix major problems in their homes?”

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that this question had been raised at Council at the end of last year and she referred Mr Fox to the webcast in which she had explained the situation following a visit that she had made with the Ward Councillors. Councillor Hay-Justice believed that all the issues had now been addressed apart from one door, for which parts had been ordered, and asked Mr Fox to make her or the Ward Councillors aware if there were any other issues.

In his supplementary question, Mr Fox highlighted cases where he believed work was outstanding and stated that if anyone still believed that Labour would help them with housing why should they continue to do so.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that Layton Crescent works had been completed and reminded Mr Fox to use the Ward Councillors as a route to report issues.

The next question was from Richard Harris:

“Fly tipping, graffiti and street litter blights this borough in its entirety but especially in the north of the borough. However, it is increasingly clear that this council is repeatedly ignoring residents’ reports of fly tipping in the north of the borough leading to a loss of confidence in local democracy and a loss of pride in this borough. Can we have a commitment that reports are responded to in a timely manner in order to restore confidence from with community”.

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali explained the differences in response to fly tipping on public and private land and asked Mr Harris to contact him with any specific cases that were outstanding.

In his supplementary question, Mr Harris asked whether there was a reason that the streets in the borough were such a mess down to the fact that the council could not afford to provide basic services to the residents anymore due to financial mismanagement of the Labour Group.

In his response, Councillor Ali confirmed that nothing had been removed from the waste management contract.

The next question was from Blake O'Donnell:

“Fly-tipping has been a continual blight in Norbury Park. It has been raised time and again at Council Meetings and yet the problem persists with no sign of any improvement. Does Labour like fly tipping or have they simply given up?”

In his response, Councillor Ali reassured Mr O'Donnell that the council proactively dealt with fly tipping and stated that more than 95% of reports were removed within 24 hours and that the council had issued over 1800 fixed penalty notices and had achieved 106 successful prosecutions.

In his supplementary question, Mr O'Donnell asked why the council did not undertake more on the ground measures such as installing a skip on public land, informing the residents that it existed and putting up notices in fly tipping hotspots saying that there will be prosecutions for doing it.

In his response, Councillor Ali stated that he could not place skips in public parks and confirmed that there were plenty of bins in all the parks with additional provision in the summer time and signs were already up in hot spot areas.

Leader and Cabinet Member Questions

With the end of time allocated to questions from members of the public in attendance the Mayor moved on to questions from members to the Leader and Cabinet Members.

Questions to the Leader

In his question, Councillor Perry asked whether the Local Plan would still be submitted to the Planning Inspector later this month and questioned whether now was the right time to be doing so at a time of a change of governance of the council.

In her response, the Leader reminded Members that Council had made the decision on how to respond.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Perry acknowledged the Leader's personal effort in stepping up as Leader and wished her well in her future endeavours.

In her response, the Leader thanked Councillor Perry for his kind words.

In his question, Councillor Fraser asked how the Leader had turned adversity into progressive change.

In her response, the Leader stated that maintaining local control had been vital and outlined a number of steps that had been taken and reiterated some of the points she had made earlier. The leader continued by listing the services that had been protected.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Fraser asked how the Turnaround Brick by Brick programme would be added to affordable homes in Croydon this year and next.

In her response, the Leader stated that there would be 337 more genuinely affordable homes through Brick by Brick's programme and that the delivery of affordable homes in the borough was a great achievement in tackling the borough's housing crisis.

In his question, Councillor Jason Cummings asked why the Labour group felt that it was appropriate for the Chair of Scrutiny to be from the same party as the elected Mayor.

In her response, the Leader stated that it seemed that the Opposition had already conceded defeat in the Mayoral election.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings stated that when they won the election the Conservative Group would like the Chairman to be from a different party as that would be a better way to hold the Mayor to account and asked again why was it blocked.

In her response, the Leader stated that Scrutiny had been invested in an independent chair of the General Purposes and Audit Committee and given it the resources to carry out its function without party politics.

In his question, Councillor Mann thanked those community champions with whom he had worked and asked how the successors could maintain and build upon the progress made in Crystal Palace and Upper Norwood.

In her response, the Leader hoped that after the election there would be a direct link to the permanency he sought.

In her question, Councillor Oviri asked whether the Leader still felt that having an elected Mayor was a bad idea.

In her reply, the Leader reminded Members that it had been important to put that view to the people of Croydon and there was an emphatic vote in favour of an elected Mayor.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Oviri asked whether the Leader shared the electorate's enthusiasm for the upcoming election.

In her response, the Leader stated that she was in favour of the democratic response that the people of Croydon had chosen and she hoped that having an elected Mayor would elevate its voice in the London-wide conversation.

Pool 1

With the end of the time allocated for questions to the Leader, the Mayor moved to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool. Councillor Hay-Justice, Councillor Shahul-Hameed and Councillor Muhammad Ali were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Hay-Justice had no announcements.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed made her announcements regarding the Business Expo which had taken place and the Big Lunch events which were due to take place over the Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend.

Councillor Muhammad Ali made his announcements regarding the installation of electric vehicle charging points and the new business low emission scheme along London Road. In addition, Councillor Ali confirmed that the tree planting drive was continuing including the school tree planting project.

Councillor Ali concluded by confirming that he would not be seeking re-election and thanked all those who had supported him over the years.

In her question, Councillor Hale asked how the Cabinet Member could state that the Housing Service was one of the best when the Housing Improvement Board Report had stated that not enough improvements had been made in the last year or whether the Board was wrong in its assessment.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice clarified that the aim was to be the best through setting up the Improvement Board and that the Board's report was not where the council had hoped to be and that the pace of improvement needed to be faster.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hale stated that tenants had not been consulted on the 4.1% rise in rent.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that tenants and leaseholders had been consulted on the increase which was in line with Central Government's recommendations and reminded Members that the consultation was not mandatory.

In his question, Councillor Carserides asked what support the council provided to help businesses recover from the pandemic.

In her reply, Councillor Shahul-Hameed confirmed that some businesses had been adversely affected by the pandemic particularly those in the night-time economy, hospitality, culture, and leisure. Councillor Shahul-Hameed continued by listing the support that was being provided by the council and the business groups that they were working with to deliver this funding.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Carserides asked what further support was required from Government to support businesses.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that she would continue to campaign for further support, such as rate relief and VAT reductions.

In his question, Councillor Millson asked which were the four Priority 1 and Priority 2 issues that were still outstanding from the Air Quality Audit carried out in 2018/19 and why they had not been closed after such a long period of time.

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that the Air Quality Action Plan was currently under review and that the updated Air Quality Strategy and Action Plan would be going out to the public in due course and offered to speak to Councillor Millson directly to give him more specific details.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Millson stated that he believed that the Air Quality Action Plan had not been monitored and this had been picked up by Internal Audit and asked why this audit point had not been tracked by Cabinet Members.

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that air quality was being tracked and that the revised Strategy and Action Plan would link to other strategies related to the environment and climate change.

Councillor Canning asked when the new bus shelters would be installed as the previous ones had been removed ten months ago.

In response, Councillor Muhammad Ali reminded Members that a contract had been signed with VALO four months ago and 53 sites had been submitted for planning; some shelters were expected to be installed within the next few weeks. The delay had been due to ensuring that the design of the shelters was right.

Councillor Stranack stated that the decision to close the Addington Community Centre would leave the New Addington Boxing Club homeless and that next year's budget would cut two police officers from the New Addington Safer Neighbourhood Team. Councillor Stranack also asked whether Councillor Shahul-Hameed and the rest of the Cabinet felt that they had let the residents of New Addington down.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed reminded Members that the council worked very closely with the Police and the community to make sure that there were enough Police, and that involvement with the Safer Neighbourhood Team ensured that these issues were tackled collaboratively.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Stranack stated that the community of New Addington was very disappointed by this decision and asked that the Cabinet Member worked with Councillor Young to consult with the community before making the decision to sell the valued community asset.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed acknowledged the community's concern at the lack of community spaces for young people and outlined some of the support that was being given to community and voluntary organisations.

Councillor Jewitt asked the Cabinet Member to confirm that the concerns of the Grange Road residents about speeding vehicles would be monitored as a matter of urgency.

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that the signage installed in 2020 had been effective but where motorists insisted on travelling at speed enforcement would be needed and the council must rely on this to be carried out by the Metropolitan Police. Councillor Ali continued by stating that he would raise the concerns with the Metropolitan Police and request some additional enforcement was carried out.

Councillor Ali concluded by giving some information on the Roadwatch Scheme which he would pass on to Councillor Jewitt.

Councillor Redfern stated that there had been a homeless community in the Wellesley Road subway and asked why this was being allowed to happen.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that she had been approached by several councillors who were concerned about particular individuals and that officers had been working with partners to provide a wraparound service. However, it had been difficult to encourage some individuals to move at this time.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Redfern asked for more specific actions that would be undertaken in the next few weeks.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that this issue was not as easy to resolve as many people thought as some of these individuals had complex issues and there were a number of agencies working closely together to provide support. In addition those agencies ensured that the wellbeing of the individuals was maintained and not all of them chose to accept the accommodation that was available.

Pool 2

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool, the Mayor signalled he was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the second pool. Councillor King and Councillor Young were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor King used his announcement to pay tribute to all those councillors who had chosen to step aside at the elections in May and especially to the Leader whom he was proud to have served alongside.

Councillor Young had no announcements.

In his question, Councillor Jason Cummings stated that during the period that Croydon Affordable Housing was identified as having a £73 million risk an ex-Labour councillor in Croydon was appointed as a Director and the appointment had never been brought forward to council. He asked who had made that appointment.

In his reply, Councillor King stated that the appointment had been made before he had become the Cabinet Member.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings stated that the website was not updated for fifteen months so no one knew that he had been appointed as a director of Croydon Affordable Housing and asked again

whether the Cabinet Member felt it was appropriate to appoint a Labour politician to a Director post.

In his response, Councillor King stated that as he had not been involved in the process he did not know what criteria were applied to the appointment, the experience or skills required. However, Councillor King reminded Members that the governance arrangements had been improved and more training provided since this appointment had been made.

In her question, Councillor Jewitt asked what assumptions the council had made regarding inflation the next year and for the remainder of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

In his reply, Councillor King stated that when the MTFS was agreed in March 2021 it had been assumed that wage and contract inflation would be 2% but this had been raised during the course of the year.

Councillor King reminded Members that in the recently agreed budget, contract inflation was assumed at 5% and wage inflation at 3% and thought that these were prudent assumptions but acknowledged that should inflation continue to rise then the situation may need to be reviewed.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Jewitt asked what the consequences of rising inflation were for the council.

In his response, Councillor King stated that the cost for the year 2022/23 of rising inflation was £20 million and for the term of the MTFS is would be £50 million and that this would lead to less funding for resident priorities.

Councillor Roche asked whether the Cabinet Member thought that it was morally acceptable to set a budget based on fixed penalty notices.

In his reply, Councillor King stated that he did not believe that the issuing of fines was a question of morality.

Councillor Prince asked what was the forecast for this years' council budget and what the implications were for the next year as a result.

In his reply, Councillor King stated that the latest forecast was a broadly positive one with a £1.6 million predicted underspend. Any underspend would go into reserves to give additional relief against some of the uncertainties next year such as inflation.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Prince asked whether the difficult decisions that had been necessary to produce a balanced budget had been supported by the Opposition.

In his response, Councillor King stated that none of the difficult decisions taken had been supported by the Opposition.

In his question, Councillor Ward asked when the public would hear the results of the three investigations currently being undertaken.

In his response, Councillor King confirmed that the work was ongoing and believed that the Chief Executive would brief Councillors when she was in a position to do so.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ward asked for assurances that evidence would not be lost.

In his response, Councillor King acknowledged that Councillor Ward was an early advocate for better retention of documentation and hoped that he would state that the situation had improved.

Councillor Agboola asked the Cabinet Member for assurance that when property assets had been sold, that the monies were ploughed back into the communities where these sales had taken place.

In his reply, Councillor Young stated that he could not give that assurance as the funds became capital receipts which were then used ahead of any borrowing due to the interest costs incurred on borrowing.

In his question, Councillor Kolade asked when the last time was that the external review of the council's internal audit function took place and when the next one was due.

In his reply, Councillor Young stated that he did not know the exact date but would write to Councillor Kolade giving him full details.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Kolade asked in light of the issues that had been raised by external auditors, what confidence the Cabinet member had in the internal audit processes.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that he had absolute confidence in the internal audit function of the council.

In her question, Councillor Jewitt asked whether the council's commissioning and procurement function was fit for purpose as the current council term came to an end and how prepared it was to make the budget savings required in 2022/23.

In his response, Councillor Young explained that the work that had been undertaken in reviewing all the contracts and improving governance had already led to savings being made.

Pool 3

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the second pool, the Mayor signalled he was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool. Councillor Campbell, Councillor Lewis and Councillor Flemming were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Campbell thanked the Leader for her service and Councillors Bernadette Khan and Louise Woodley for their support to social care. Councillor Campbell thanked the staff of Freeman Court for their work which had been reflected in the most recent Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection.

Councillor Campbell continued by giving Members an update on the work of the Autism Partnership.

Councillor Flemming reminded Members of the achievements made within her portfolio over the last four years. Councillor Flemming gave her thanks to Councillor Shafi Khan for his work in supporting her throughout and also listed others councillors on both sides of the chamber and ex-councillors for their support and encouragement.

Councillor Lewis reflected on the last eight years and stated that there had been significant investment in the culture sector over that time. In addition, the borough had been awarded nearly £250,000 of Heritage Lottery Funding for a music trail within the borough which was in addition to the £250,000 already pledged by Heritage Lottery Fund.

In addition, Councillor Lewis clarified a response given earlier in the meeting, regarding the Local Plan review timetable.

Councillor Bains asked for details on the proposal for the new leisure centre in the south of the borough.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that he had long been an advocate of a new leisure centre in the south of the borough but that it would be down to the new Administration to decide on a plan for delivery.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bains asked for the specific date of when the leisure centre would open.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that it would be up to the electorate to decide at the election which option they preferred.

Councillor Carserides asked how within the Authorised Contractual Scheme (ACS) Strategy how demand would be reduced without harming the most vulnerable.

In her response, Councillor Campbell stated that the model being used ensured that people received the right level of support and the right time to reduce the demand.

Councillor Campbell continued by informing Members of the reporting mechanisms including annually by the Care Quality Commission.

Councillor Chatterjee asked how much the proposed new leisure centre in the south of the borough was going to cost.

In his response, Councillor Lewis reiterated that it would be up to the future Administration to decide on the options and that should the Labour candidate for Mayor be elected then a feasibility study would be undertaken.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Chatterjee asked whether the costs would be cost neutral or similar to the Fairfield Halls refurbishment costs.

In his response, Councillor Lewis confirmed that Fairfield Halls was in a better place as a result of the investment and was looking forward to being able to support the cultural sector in Croydon.

In his question, Councillor Bonello asked that following the death of Kyrell Matthews what assurances the Cabinet Member could give that Children's Services in Croydon were well placed to ensure that the children and young people were adequately safeguarded.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that this case had been discussed at Scrutiny and listed the learning that had arisen and some of the changes that had occurred in working with other partners to join up information.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bonello asked what had changed in the way the department operated since Kyrell's death.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that the referral thresholds had been reviewed and all cases were now reviewed independently by the Safeguarding Partnership.

In her question, Councillor Appleton asked whether the labour Party Mayoral candidate had shared fully costed plans for the new leisure centre with Labour Councillors.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that he had made clear the choice that the electorate could make on 5 May.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Appleton stated that her question had not been answered and asked again whether fully costed plans had been shared by the labour mayoral candidate.

In his response, Councillor Lewis stated that there was a fully costed plan to deliver a new leisure centre in Purley.

In his question, Councillor Bonello asked whether the Cabinet Member would join him in thanking the social workers for their tireless work going above and beyond to keep the borough's young people safe and whether she agreed that Croydon was fortunate to have such a dedicated and child focussed workforce.

In her response, Councillor Flemming agreed wholeheartedly with Councillor Bonello and that it was both a stressful and rewarding role. All Members, as Corporate Parents needed to applaud them for their dedication.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Bonello asked what impact a decade of austerity had had on the way Children's Services worked in this borough.

In her response, Councillor Flemming confirmed that austerity had blighted Children's Services in the borough and had added pressure right across the country. She stated that it cost money to support the most vulnerable children and so commitment was required from the Government.

In his question, Councillor Parker stated that Purley Pool and Leisure was a well-loved and well used facility and that the Conservative Mayoral candidate had put forward a plan to refurbish and reopen Purley Pool and asked the

Cabinet Member to explain the Labour position on a proposed new leisure centre in Purley.

In his response, Councillor Lewis agreed that Purley Pool was a much-loved facility which was at the end of its life and patching it up was not considered an option.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Parker stated that the Administration had let the people of Croydon down and their refusal to refurbish Purley Pool showed that they had learnt no lessons from Fairfield Halls.

In his response, Councillor Lewis reiterated that there would be a clear choice for voters on 5 May.

With an end to the time allocated to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool, the Mayor brought Croydon Question Time to a close.

12/21 **Member Petitions**

The following petition was presented by Councillor Perry of behalf of residents:

'St Thomas Becket RC Primary School sits on the busy Birchanger Road in South Norwood. The road is particularly dangerous during drop-off and pick-up times with poor driving, irresponsible parking and speeding vehicles. There have been a number of near misses, and we feel it is only a matter of time before a serious injury occurs.

We the undersigned therefore call on Croydon Council to install a safe crossing outside St Thomas Becket RC Primary School as soon as possible.'

In his response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that it was important to work with the school to enforce any of the parking and speeding issues and he was also happy to add the school to the list of possible School Street sites. Councillor Ali agreed to look into this and respond back with more details.

13/21 **Council Debate Motions**

The Mayor asked the Monitoring Officer, John Jones, to read out the first Debate Motion on behalf of the Administration.

“This council welcomes the fact that the people of Croydon stand in unity and solidarity with the people of Ukraine, whose great cities and centres of population are under attack from the armed aggression of the Russian State.

This council welcomes the effort of Croydon residents who are raising funds to provide aid to Ukraine and applauds those of our citizens who are opening their homes to refugees fleeing the war.

This council is proud of the support provided to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people, acknowledging that high quality social care services have enabled children to thrive and reach their potential.

We believe the positive actions taken by the council, our voluntary and community sector and, most of all, our residents, over many years to make refugees and asylum seekers welcome in this town, is evidence of the warmth and generosity of Croydon and its citizens.

This Council welcomes and endorses the application that is being prepared for Croydon to apply for Borough of Sanctuary status”.

The Mayor asked Councillor Wood to propose the motion.

Councillor Wood expressed his views on the situation in Ukraine and how the people across the borough and nation were coming together to welcome refugees. Councillor Wood stated that this needed to be properly funded and that proper borough recognition would be entirely fitting.

Councillor Carserides seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Gatland expressed her horror at the scenes of destruction from Ukraine and the queues of women and children queuing at the Polish border seeking sanctuary and was proud of the support being given both nationally and locally.

Councillor Gatland supported the motion.

Councillor Streeter echoed the shock and the tragedy that everyone had seen over the past weeks and was encouraged by the international community coming together and acknowledged the great efforts being undertaken but stated that more needed to be done.

Councillor Streeter continued to say that whilst the focus was currently on Ukraine it should be remembered that there were people throughout the world living in fear and terror.

Councillor Streeter supported the motion.

Councillor Carserides stated that the invasion of Ukraine was not just an attack on that country but an attack on sovereignty, democracy and freedom; values that all in the chamber stood for.

Councillor Carserides continued by relating the situation for one woman and her children trying to link up with their sponsor in Croydon. Croydon had taken more refugees than any other local authority but that had come at a financial cost to the authority.

The motion was put to the vote and was unanimously carried.

The Mayor asked the Monitoring Officer, John Jones to read out the second Debate Motion on behalf of the Opposition.

“The last eight years have been a humiliation for Croydon and its people, as this failing Council has lurched from one disaster to another.

Two Reports in the Public Interest, two S114 notices, unheard of in local government history, the financial meltdowns of the borough, the botched and unlawful refurbishment of Fairfield Halls, Council tenants living in squalor because of systemic failures in maintenance, inappropriate development across the borough inflicted through a deeply unpopular Local Plan, the Council-owned developer Brick by Brick building on much needed green spaces, streets flowing with rubbish and fly tips and an explosion in graffiti, residents feel unsafe on our streets and we have a town centre that has been allowed to wither and decay.

This, sadly, is the reality of life in Croydon for tens of thousands of our residents, from the very north to the very south of our borough.

It does not need to be this way. Croydon is a fantastic place with wonderful communities and organisations that make such a difference every day. They give hope for a brighter tomorrow and in partnership with the Council, we can restore pride in our borough.

The Council must fix our finances. The Council must introduce a Tenants’ Charter that respects our tenants. The Council must drop the planning design guide that destroys family homes and the character of communities. The Council must clean our streets and restore the graffiti removal team. The Council can better support the Police and mentor our young people. The

Council must re-imagine our Town Centre which will bring inward investment to revitalise our whole borough. There is hope for Croydon.

In the meantime, this Council apologises to the people of Croydon for the abject failings inflicted on them by the current arrogant Administration that has failed to take responsibility or listen to Croydon over the past eight years.”

The Mayor asked Councillor Pollard to propose the motion.

Councillor Pollard stated that this motion asked for the Administration to apologise for the catastrophic failures. Councillor Pollard continued by stating that he knew that some councillors on the Labour benches were equally as angry about the state of affairs as he was and he apologised for his small part in this. Councillor Pollard then listed a number of issues which were particularly hated by the people of Croydon.

Councillor Perry seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader stated that the motion did not reflect the full story of the situation as over the past seventeen months a great deal of work had happened to balance the council's finances. The Leader continued by listing all of the services that were being kept open and running and asked the Opposition how they were intending to fund their elections pledges when the Tory Government had spent the last twelve years cutting funding to all local authorities.

The Leader opposed the motion.

Councillor Ben-Hassel stated that when she first became a councillor she was shocked at the lax financial controls but could now see how the situation had improved over the last eighteen months. However, more needed to be done to embed those new processes.

Councillor Ben-Hassel continued by reminding Members that the Administration had taken collective responsibility over budgetary decisions that had to be made as a result of Government underfunding and that the Government had suggested greater commercialisation by councils to make up for the reduction in grant funding. Councillor Ben-Hassel listed some of the areas of the public services that had been worst affected.

Councillor Ben-Hassel opposed the motion.

Councillor Perry stated that over the last eight years the Labour council had lurched from one disaster to another including bankrupting the council and listed a number of those projects.

Councillor Perry continued by listing the services that had been reduced and accused the Administration of failing to listen to residents and listed the priorities that the incoming Mayor must do.

The motion was put to the vote and was lost.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the time for the meeting was approaching and asked if the Leader was happy to extend the meeting by twenty minutes.

The Leader proposed the motion.

Councillor Perry seconded the motion.

All Members were in favour of the motion to extend the meeting by up to twenty minutes.

14/21 **Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision**

The Mayor explained that in order to make time for retiring Members to make final addresses to council, the administration had agreed to forego the time permitted to them to introduce each set of recommendations and both political groups had agreed that they were content for Council to vote on all four sets of recommendations together.

The Mayor invited the Leader to move all the recommendations.

The Leader moved the recommendations.

Councillor King seconded the recommendations.

The recommendations were put to the vote and were carried.

RESOLVED: Council **AGREED** the recommendations in the reports as set out below:

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GENERAL PURPOSES & AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 JANUARY 2022

Revisions to the Council's Constitution

- 1.1 To approve the changes to the Constitution as detailed in section 2 of the report (Appendix 1) and set out more fully in Appendix 1.1.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GENERAL PURPOSES & AUDIT COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 MARCH 2022

Revisions to the Council's Constitution

- 1.2 To approve the changes to the Constitution as detailed in section 2 of the report (Appendix 2) and set out more fully in Appendix 2.1 and that:

- i) The following changes shall be implemented with immediate effect:
- Section 4.22 (Emergency or extreme urgency) of Part 3 - Responsibility for Functions; and
 - Part 4I - Tender and Contract Regulations
- ii) All other changes shall be implemented with effect from 00.01 hours on the third day after the day of declaration of the result of the poll at the first election of the Mayor.

Review of the Scheme of Members' Allowances

- 1.3 To consider the options detailed in the report on an updated scheme of Members' allowances to full Council, informed by the recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel and to agree the proposal detailed in Appendix 3.2 of the report (Appendix 3);
- 1.4 To agree the proposal to reintroduce directly provided ICT to Members and the elected Mayor as described in section four of the report (Appendix 3);

- 1.5 To authorise the Monitoring Officer to comply with the necessary statutory publicity requirements in respect of the Independent Review Panel report 2022; the on-going annual publicity of the Members' scheme of allowances which is required; and the approval of the revised Members' Allowance Scheme following consideration of the proposal recommended by the Committee (as per recommendation 1.3 above)
- 1.6 To delegate to the General Purposes and Audit Committee authority to agree an annual adjustment of allowances by reference to the annual local government staff pay settlement where the only change made to the Scheme in any year is that effected by such annual adjustment; and
- 1.7 To agree that a further review of the scheme be undertaken either following the May 2022 local elections, if required, or following the publication of the further review of the remuneration of councillors due to be undertaken by London Councils' Independent Remuneration Panel during 2022-23.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET HELD ON 21 MARCH 2022

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 Year Business Plan 2021- 2051 and HRA Capital Programme 2022/23

- 1.8 To approve the HRA Capital Programme for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix 4.6.

15/21 Vote of Thanks

The Mayor explained that this was the last meeting of the Council before the elections in May and that there was a number of Councillors for whom this was the final Council meeting.

With the agreement of both Groups, time was made available to invite nine of those councillors to make a short final speech to the Council meeting.

Councillor Mann outlined some of the projects in his ward and thanked those councillors who had supported him during his time as a councillor. In conclusion Councillor Mann thanked those in the community and officers for wanting to deliver services to the residents of Croydon.

Councillor Hollands thanked the residents of his ward who had supported him for the 32 years that he had been a councillor. Councillor Hollands continued by listing those committees that he had been part of and thanked those Cabinet Members and officers who had supported him.

Councillor Prince thanked councillors who had supported her through the eight years that she had been a councillor and listed some of the committees and other bodies that she had been a part of. Councillor Prince thanked the officers who supported those bodies and to all officers who put so much effort into supporting the people of Croydon.

Councillor Helen Pollard reflected on some of the highlights of her time as a councillor as well as some of the challenges. Councillor Pollard continued by thanking all the diverse groups and their events that she had been able to attend and concluded by thanking her fellow ward councillors.

Councillor Woodley highlighted some of the high points in her nearly 24 years as a councillor and the people with whom she had worked. A particular highlight was the founding of the One Croydon Alliance. Councillor Woodley concluded by thanking officers for their work and support and to the people of New Addington.

Councillor Oviri stated that although she would no longer be a councillor it would not mean that she no longer cared about the people of Croydon. Councillor Oviri continued by thanking the people who had supported her, fellow councillors, officers and members of the community.

Councillor Bernadette Khan stated that it had been a privilege to serve the people in her ward and to work alongside the diverse communities in the borough. Councillor Khan expressed her huge thanks to the officers who were dealing with the day-to-day situations and especially the staff on the front desk at the Town Hall.

Councillor Millson thanked the people of his ward who elected him but also to those people who provided such great support to the community during the Covid pandemic. In addition, Councillor Millson thanked his ward colleague, Councillor Stranack.

In conclusion, Councillor Millson stated that they hoped that the new constitutional arrangements would be an opportunity to change how the politics in the chamber would operate in future.

Councillor Letts stated what a pleasure it had been to serve the people of Croydon for 36 years as a councillor and highlighted some of the changes that had taken place over those years. Councillor Letts continued by recalling some of the work that she had done to help the people of Croydon.

In conclusion, Councillor Letts hoped that whoever sat in the chamber after 5 May inspired the children and young people of the borough to make Croydon great again.

As the time for the conclusion of the meeting had passed, the Monitoring Officer asked whether Council would support suspending Standing Orders.

This was proposed by Councillor Henson and seconded.

All members were in favour.

The Mayor passed the Chair to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Felicity Flynn, who presided over the vote of thanks to the outgoing Mayor of Croydon.

The Deputy Mayor invited the Mayor to give his farewell address.

The Mayor stated that it had been a great honour and pleasure to become the First Citizen and Mayor of Croydon after 40 years of community work.

His mayoral year started during the height of the Pandemic and as everything gradually, slowly started to open up again, he had had the opportunity to attend engagements in Croydon as well as some outside of the borough.

Initially the Mayor was bit worried about how he would be able to manage without any support from the Macebearer or chauffeur, with no car, only one member of staff instead of the previous three, and with less than 50% of the budget compared to previous years because of the savings that the Council had had to make.

However, during the pandemic all had needed to develop new ways of working and the Mayor's Office, as the first citizen of Croydon, had been no different.

He said reaching out to the community and meeting with them, representing Croydon, being an ambassador for Croydon had been a great honour.

So far, the Mayor had attended hundreds of engagements and had enjoyed every one of them. While a chauffeur driven car would have been nice, his chosen method of travel was his own car and also Taxi.

Every one of his visits was worth the trip as it gave him the opportunity to learn first-hand about the amazing work that the public sector, NHS, Voluntary and charity sector organisations had all been doing to help the community in Croydon.

Throughout the year, as well as meeting local, public sector, voluntary sector and charity sector organisations, he also had the opportunity to meet the business community which Croydon hosted, especially small business owners, who were affected dramatically by the pandemic.

The council supported them with all resources available and as it slowly came out of the pandemic it was great to see that so many of them had survived. However, the council needed to promote and use its small businesses more, which were so important to the local economy, giving them an opportunity to grow.

The Mayor had visited many schools in the town and had greatly enjoyed the hustings that the pupils participated in. he stated that they had so much talent, and with the support of their parents and the teachers in Croydon's schools and colleges the Mayor looked forward to seeing what they could achieve in the future.

The Emperor of Japan Gifted 1000 cherry trees to Prince Charles during his tenure who in turn gave 100 trees to Croydon. The Mayor personally planted 50 of them in Sanderstead recreation ground where Japan's Embassy Counsel was present.

The Mayor had also planted more cherry trees outside Croydon University Hospital that day as part of Her Majesty's Platinum year celebration and in memory of the over 1000 of Croydon residents who had tragically died during the Covid pandemic.

Throughout the year the Mayor was also honoured and privileged to open, with the wife of the late Malcolm Wicks, Malcolm Wicks House, which provided 90 affordable flats in the heart of Croydon. Malcolm Wicks was a very popular MP for Croydon North. Having worked with him for over 20

years, the Mayor confirmed that housing was a great passion for him and he was sure he would be proud of the homes Malcom Wicks House would provide to Croydon residents.

As well as attending numerous exhibitions at the Clock Tower Café this year, the Mayor also had the opportunity to meet so many artists that lived and worked in Croydon - artists and creatives that made Croydon a vibrant place to live.

Sadly Croydon had lost a number of young people through knife crime throughout his time as Mayor. The Mayor attended numerous meetings with the community, the Police and also family members of the victims. There was so much more to do to decrease knife crime in the region.

The Mayor paid tribute to the amazing work that doctors, nurses, other NHS employees and social care workers had done during the pandemic. The Mayor also had the opportunity to visit the care homes in Croydon, and enjoyed seeing first hand throughout the year the essential work they did.

The Town Hall had celebrated many occasions this year and the Mayor had had the opportunity to raise many flags. For the first time the Mayor had arranged for the celebration of Pongal, which is a Tamil thanksgiving harvest festival.

It was also a great pleasure to organise Mother Tongue International Language Day which was recognised by The United Nations General Assembly. The day was especially poignant for a multicultural town like Croydon that had so many diverse people who called the town their home, people who made the place they lived in so exciting and vibrant, people in Croydon where the Mayor was proud to call his home.

During his tenure the Mayor was invited as a special guest to the opening of the Non-Resident Bangladeshi World Conference. It was held in Dhaka Bangladesh which was organised by the Centre for Research Non-Resident Bangladeshi. During his visits the Mayor met many Bangladeshi Government Ministers and officials, and had the opportunity to promote Croydon and shared how Bangladeshi non-residents were contributing to UK life and to Croydon Life.

The Mayor also had the opportunity to attend hustings by university students on how local authorities compared between both countries.

The Mayor also organised a fund raising dinner where many high-profile dignitaries including the British High Commissioner and the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh were present.

The Mayor had three charities that he raised funds for, two of them for cancer and one for the homeless people. Cancer was a killer disease, and it was in his heart because he had lost three siblings to the disease.

There were number of colleagues stepping down from the council at the 5 May elections that year. In fact, there were so many stepping down that the Mayor did not have time to mention them all. He paid particular tribute to those with whom he had worked over the years: Shafi Khan, Toni Lets, Bernadette Khan, Pat Ryan, Pat Clouder, Paul Scott and his Ward colleague, Alison Butler.

The Mayor thanked his wife Rohema for supporting him during the year, Deva Ponnosami and his team of charity board advisors, Anwar Hussain and his Executive Committee members, the Bangladesh Welfare Association, Abul Hussain his second consort, fellow councillors, past mayors, community leaders, Seth Alker the Head of Mayoral services and finally again special thanks to Hema Basanthkumar the Mayoral Executive officer without whose support he would not have managed.

The Deputy Mayor thanked the Mayor for his address and invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali to move the vote of thanks to the Mayor. In doing so she acknowledged that the Mayor would be the last under the current system and acknowledged that Covid restrictions had meant that the role of civic mayor had had to adapt.

The Leader continued by thanking the Mayor for his support of the ethnic minority communities in the borough and additionally through his chosen charities.

The Deputy Mayor invited the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Perry, to second the motion and he thanked the Mayor for inviting him to a number of events and for the fantastic amount of money raised for his charities during the Mayoral year.

The Deputy Mayor put the motion as set out in the papers to the vote with the vote of thanks, which was passed unanimously.

The meeting ended at 10.31 pm

Signed:

Date:

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