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Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 1 February 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

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

PART A

14/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 December 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

15/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

16/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

17/21 **Announcements**

The Chair **MOVED** the suspension of Council Procedure Rules. This was **SECONDED** by Councillor Creatura and,

RESOLVED, to:

1. Reduce the amount of time allocated to Mayor and Cabinet questions from 1 hour 45 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes;
2. Direct questions to the Mayor who would be afforded the opportunity to call on other members to support answering questions where necessary; and,
3. Reduce the amount of time allowed for each of the Maiden Speeches to a maximum of two minutes to make parity with previous meetings.

18/21 **The Croydon Debate**

Council received a petition from the public that had achieved just under 2,000 signatures by the deadline for submission to the meeting. Charles Barber, the lead member of the petition group, attended Council to put forward the case for the petition, and told the story of a resident who had volunteered at the garden centre for 31 years. Charles Barber explained that closing the garden centre would take away the livelihoods and sense of purpose of so many people, and that he hoped Council could share the vision he had of the garden centre, and of the place it could be for the people of Croydon.

Councillor Jason Cummings, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded describing the financial position of the council, and stated that closures such as these were the personal consequences for a lot of residents. Councillor Cummings explained that the marking of the centre for closure was not a reflection on the work of the centre itself, but that the council had no choice. Councillor Cummings explained that more decisions like this would need to be forthcoming, thanks to the mistreatment of council finances by the previous political occupiers of the council, but that the council would try to mitigate the impact of the closure on the volunteers and members of the centre.

Councillor Mohammed Islam thanked the resident for their passionate speech and recognised that they were speaking on behalf of the borough's most vulnerable. Councillor Islam expressed the opinion that closing the centre would be to contravene members' duty of care to those residents. Councillor Islam suggested thinking creatively about the use of the centre and its relationship with the Cherry Hub to continue to provide services that were needed. Councillor Islam called upon the Mayor to investigate whether there

were opportunities for the garden centre to be self-funded, rather than closing it.

Councillor Yvette Hopley, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, clarified that the Cherry Hub Day Centre was not up for closure, and assured residents that the excellent services for those with disabilities and autism would continue, and that an impact assessment on whatever decision was made would be undertaken.

19/21 **Croydon Question Time**

The questions and answers were printed in the agenda ahead of the meeting. The first questioner did not attend, and so the Chair invited the next resident to ask their question, to which Mayor Jason Perry responded thanking them for their commitment and care to the Cherry Orchard Garden Centre. The Mayor also stated that a final decision had not been made on the matter. Charles Barber then asked why volunteers had been prevented from selling Christmas trees during the festive season, to which the Mayor explained he was not involved in the day to day running of the centre.

Carolyn Kellaris asked whether Mayor found it acceptable that residents had been issued fines from Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) schemes that were not fully implemented and that the Mayor did not support. The Mayor explained that there would be engagement with residents later in the month on the LTNs that had just gone live.

The Chair explained that the next question, as printed in the agenda, breached the rules of questioning as laid out in the Constitution (Part 4A, Council Procedure Rules), and would therefore not be responded to at this meeting.

The next question from Mark Samuel was followed by a supplementary question, in which Mark Samuel asked whether the Mayor would make a request to HM King Charles III to visit Croydon during the coronation year, to which the Mayor responded that he always welcomed a royal visit, and that the council was making great progress making the town centre of Croydon cleaner and brighter.

Members of Council then asked questions of the Mayor and Cabinet Members, the first of which concerned the government's plans to end Windrush remedy measures, to which the Mayor responded that the Conservative group had appointed Windrush Champions the previous year

but that the Labour group did not appoint and so the council did not run the scheme.

In response to a question regarding the plans by Transport for London (TfL) to implement the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) into Croydon the Mayor expressed that he had objected to the plans and that he did not believe that it tackled air pollution.

In response to further questions regarding the costs of running the Cherry Orchard Garden Centre the Mayor stated he was happy to share a breakdown of the costs if they were requested following the meeting.

In response to a question the Mayor expressed his disappointment at seeing shops closing in Crystal Palace, and that the council was looking at having a shared prosperity fund and potentially a Business Improvement District (BID) in the area. The Mayor also agreed to raise the issue that ending the energy discount caused to businesses with the Borough Commander.

In a question regarding the refusal for Levelling-Up funding that had come from Central Government, the Mayor confirmed that the Labour group, when in power, had not applied for the first round of funding. However, the Mayor had begun a Town Centre Advisory Board that was doing work with Westfield and other providers to bring skills and investment into Croydon.

In response to a call for the Mayor to apologise to staff for the late implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) which had seen some failure of the scheme, the Mayor explained that it was not the fault of council staff that the schemes had failed and so no apology was necessary.

In response to a question about tackling homelessness the Mayor explained that the council was conducting a multi-agency approach and that it had re-established the Safer Streets group to improve the situation.

In response to a question about the Council Tax Support Scheme Councillor Jason Cummings, Cabinet Member for Finance, assured members that any potential increase in Council Tax payments had been modelled against the necessary increase in support. The Mayor added that a hardship fund was available for residents in need of it.

In response to a question about waste management on housing estates the Mayor explained that a number of initiatives were going ahead to make improvements, such as the Housing Improvement Board, the Housing Transformation Panel, the Residents' Charter, and that the new repair contract was being assembled in consultation with residents.

In response to a question about encouraging footfall in district centres the Mayor stated he was listening to residents on this matter, working with BIDs, fulfilling a key election pledge of reopening Purley Pool, and trying to improve the resurrected graffiti removal service.

In response to a question about community funding the Mayor confirmed that he did not terminate the Community Fund but that it was a three-year long programme that had expired. The Mayor also explained that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) existed to deliver infrastructure and development in the borough but could not be used to fund projects outside of this.

Regarding traffic safety in Waddon Ward, the Mayor stated that TfL had provided funding to look at the Five Ways junction, and that the Mayor was putting pressure on TfL to deliver the scheme. The Mayor also expressed that he would be happy to meet with Waddon Ward councillors to discuss how to make progress.

Regarding planning applications the Mayor stated that the council was working on a design guide that would respect the character of places in the borough to make residents proud of where they lived.

In response to a question about what will be done with the Cherry Orchard Garden Centre once closed, the Mayor confirmed that assets were up for disposal as the council needed to offset its debt. Only once that had happened would the council have money to spend on more services.

Regarding the negative effects of the Cost-of-Living Crisis on residents' mental health the Mayor explained that lots of effort was going in to dealing with this. Councillor Yvette Hopley, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Social Care, explained that the Public Health team was dedicated to this and that a strategy would be reviewed by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

In response to a question about tackling anti-social behaviour, knife crime and drug dealing the Mayor confirmed that he was working with the Public Space Protection Officers and Police, and that he was happy to meet with street traders to discuss their concerns.

In response to whether the Norbury Library café could be leased short-term the Mayor explained that it was difficult to provide a service such as that short-term.

The Mayor explained that the council was committed to improving the housing offer for care leavers.

In response to a question regarding Council Tax the Mayor explained that the Hardship Fund was in place to help residents who needed support but who fell outside of the benefits system.

When asked what the Mayor was doing to ensure that the Borough of Culture celebrations truly reflected the diversity of Croydon the Mayor supported by Councillor Andy Stranack explained that there had been over 60 responses to the call for bids for funding to take part, and that there would be an all-member briefing happening which members were encouraged to attend.

20/21 **Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision**

The Chair of the General Purposes Committee, Councillor Amy Foster, introduced the report to members, asking them to note the dates that the committee had agreed for Council in the year 2023-24, and to approve the full schedule of meetings as contained in the report.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Foster, **SECONDED** by Councillor Mario Creatura and **RESOLVED**:

1. To approve the full schedule of council meetings for the municipal year 2023-24 (Appendices A & B); and,
2. To note the dates of Council approved by the General Purposes Committee.

21/21 **Recommendations deferred for Debate**

Mayor Jason Perry then introduced the report on the Council Tax Support Scheme to members.

Councillor Callton Young **MOVED** that the recommendations be deferred for debate. This is **SECONDED** by Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel, who reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Young stated that the recommendations proposed making financial savings by causing detriment to the most vulnerable, and asked how non-working residents would be able to make ends meet if they could not work additional hours.

Councillor Jason Cummings, Cabinet Member for Finance, responded that the removal of the minimum income floor created a net benefit change for claimants. Councillor Cummings also pointed out that last year the Council had voted that all members of a household must contribute towards Council Tax, which now the same members wanted to vote against.

Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel responded that difficult decisions had had to be made, but that residents were experiencing a cost-of-living crisis and that this would be too great a difficulty to add to their current financial pressures. Councillor Ben-Hassel also explained that, as a disabled person, she personally would not want to be dependent upon others under her roof to help pay Council Tax.

Councillor Andy Stranack then spoke for the motion, explaining that those with disabilities should not be used as tokens for others in their households to benefit financially, and that the change to Council Tax would tackle the root causes of disabilities and enable people to display their true abilities and talents.

The Chair then put the motion to the vote.

RESOLVED, with 34 votes for and 35 against, the Chair having used their casting vote, to reject the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme and retain the existing arrangements.

22/21 **Maiden Speeches**

Council then heard the Maiden Speeches from the following members:

- Councillor Gayle Gander, Kenley ward;
- Councillor Tamar Nwafor, Thornton Heath ward;
- Councillor Samir Dwesar, Purley and Woodcote ward; and,
- Councillor Elily Ponnuthurai, Waddon ward.

23/21 **Appointments**

There were no proposed changes to appointments.

24/21 **Council Debate Motions**

The Chair read out the Conservative Group Debate Motion, and Mayor Jason Perry spoke first, outlining that the Executive had objected to the proposals on the grounds that they were a hammer-blow to businesses and residents in Croydon. The Mayor argued that it would be unfair to carers and the elderly, and that there would be no health or environmental benefits to extending the ULEZ into Croydon.

Councillor Mario Creatura seconded the motion and reserved his right to reply.

Speaking in opposition to the motion Councillor Amy Foster argued that the benefits of extending the ULEZ would tackle health inequalities across the borough. Councillor Foster demonstrated that the most deprived of children living with asthma were 2.5 times more likely to be admitted to hospital due to the condition, and that chronic health problems kept children off school and that this had long-term economic effects on poor families.

Also speaking in opposition Councillor Stuart King argued that the Conservative members were only in opposition to the ULEZ because the Mayor of London was a Labour member. Councillor King argued that 4,000 Londoners died prematurely each year due to pollution, and that the ULEZ scheme had reduced pollution levels by almost half in Central London. Councillor King also explained that 85% of road vehicles were already ULEZ-compliant, and so there should not be a huge financial burden put on most residents.

Speaking on behalf of the motion Councillor Creatura explained that an independent report associated with ULEZ expansion showed that emissions would be very small and that the scheme was not backed up by data that it would reduce pollution in outer London. Councillor Creatura argued that it was not fair to push the costs of the ULEZ onto residents who were already struggling with the cost of living.

The Chair put the motion to the vote, and Council **RESOLVED**, with 34 votes for and 35 votes against, the Chair having used their casting vote, to reject the Conservative Group Motion.

The Chair then read out the motion submitted by the Labour Group, which was **MOVED** by Councillor Chris Clark and **SECONDED** by Councillor Rowenna Davis who reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Clark argued that Central Government should hear members' shared intention to put regeneration of the borough back on track, and that the Mayor should invite the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to speak to Croydon Council about its failed bid for funding.

Councillor Jeet Bains, Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration, pointed out that the Labour group had missed the first round of funding that could be applied for, and also that only a handful of London councils had received any funding. Councillor Bains also pointed out that the Mayor was already in talks with the Secretary of State.

Councillor Alasdair Stewart added to the observation, stating that of the 529 bids made only 111 were successful, but also that the Mayor was already taking action to help improve the town centre and that there were other funding avenues that could be explored to help with this.

Exercising her right of reply, Councillor Rowenna Davis explained that the Labour Group at the time of the first round of funding was advised not to bid by council officers, and also that the bid that was put together was solid. Councillor Davis argued that the Government held a bias against Croydon, since neighbouring borough, Sutton, did succeed in its bid. Councillor Davis also argued that it was this same bias that had prevented the Government so far from stepping in to help Croydon out of its unsustainable economic position.

The Chair put the motion to the vote and Council **RESOLVED**, with 35 votes for and 34 votes against, the Chair having used their casting vote, to carry the motion put forward by the Labour Group.

The Chair then **MOVED** that Council scheduled an extra meeting to be held. This was **SECONDED** by Councillor Creatura and **RESOLVED**, unanimously, to hold a Council meeting on Wednesday 8 March 2023.

The meeting ended at 9.53 pm

Signed:

Date:

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