

Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 19 October 2022 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, Simon Fox, Gayle Gander, Maria Gatland, Brigitte Graham, Matthew Griffiths, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson, Christopher Herman, Yvette Hopley, Mohammed Islam, Mark Johnson, Humayun Kabir, Stuart King, Ola Kolade, 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, Alasdair Stewart, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillors Sherwan Chowdhury, Karen Jewitt and Joseph Lee

PART A

27/21 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on:

- 13 December 2021;
- 31 January 2022;
- 3 February 2022;
- 23 March 2022; and,
- 25 July 2022 were agreed as accurate records.

28/21 Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Claire Bonham expressed the wish to have it recorded that she was a resident of Oval Road, since one of the public questions on the agenda related to that location.

29/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

30/21 **Announcements**

As this was the first meeting of the Council since the death of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, the Chair, Civic Mayor Councillor Alisa Flemming, invited Mayor Jason Perry and Councillor Stewart King to pay tribute. Both members described the great dedication and devotion the late queen showed to her country over seven long decades of reign. Council then held a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

The Chair also paid her respects to Badsha Quadir, who had sadly died in post only a few weeks before. Mayor Jason Perry and Councillor Stewart King also made tributes to Badsha Quadir, noting his commitment and contribution to the Borough of Croydon during his twelve years as a councillor.

Councillor Sean Fitzsimons also paid tribute to former councillor John Barlow, who had also died recently.

Council then held a minute's silence.

The Chair also updated the Council on the progress from the efforts to support the victims of the fire at Sycamore House in Thornton Heath, which had had a huge impact on their lives.

31/21 **Public Questions**

By the deadline two members of the public had submitted questions to be asked at this Council meeting. The first was asked by Kostandinos Dexiades, who was in attendance and was called upon by the Chair to ask his question to Councillor Scott Roche, Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment. Mr Dexiades asked what the council was doing about fly-tipping in hotspots in the borough, and what it would do about catching the culprits of fly-tipping, to which Councillor Roche responded that the council no longer had a budget for

the Environmental Response Team, but that there was an app in use through which residents could report incidences of fly-tipping.

Mr Dexiades was offered the opportunity to ask a supplementary question. He asked whether dog waste bins could be replaced, to which Councillor Roche responded that he would look into the matter and respond in writing.

The second question was from Melanie Felten who was also in attendance and asked how the council was going to resolve the issue for residents of Oval Road whose bins had been removed and replaced with a trial bin bag scheme, due to the narrowness of the public footpath, as the bags had attracted rats. Councillor Roche responded that this had been part of a trial scheme which the council would now review.

Ms Felten was offered the opportunity to ask a supplementary question and asked whether the Cabinet Member felt the council had been negligent, and when something would be done to solve the problem. Councillor Roche responded that there had been a meeting that day with residents, pest control, and the council's waste management provider to address the issue, and that he hoped there would be a solution by the end of November. Councillor Roche declined to comment on the question of negligence.

32/21 **The Croydon Debate**

Two Member Petitions had been received for this Council meeting, both of which requested residents' parking permits on two streets in Bensham Manor Ward. These had been delivered on behalf of residents by Councillor Humayun Kabir, whom the Chair invited to say a few words.

Councillor Kabir stated that he supported these petitions as all the surrounding streets had been designated residents' parking permits, causing build-up on these roads, which not only made it difficult for residents to park near their houses but also made it difficult for emergency vehicles to access the streets.

The petitions were put to the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment, Councillor Scott Roche, who responded that the residents of these streets had provided negative feedback to proposed Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) in the area when consulted in 2019, but that this petition gave cause to go out to consultation again.

33/21 **Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Review**

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Maria Gatland introduced the report, which gave an update to members on the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel for the 2021-22 municipal year. Councillor Gatland thanked the staff in the department who had worked so hard during the struggles presented by the Covid pandemic, financial struggles, and other difficulties to support the young people. Councillor Gatland also thanked foster carers and paid tribute to all the young people involved for their resilience, energy and the Children in Care Council.

In response to questions from members Councillor Gatland explained that all Looked After Children who went missing in the borough were assessed for risks of exploitation as they were more vulnerable than others, and the Corporate Parenting Panel decided any actions needed. Councillor Gatland also explained that the number of asylum-seeking children coming into the borough had decreased as the national transfer scheme that Central Government had introduced was initially not mandatory; it had since become mandatory which meant that other boroughs were taking in asylum-seeking children, reducing the number in Croydon by about 56%.

Councillor Gatland also clarified what was meant by Pathway Plans, and that young children in care suffered a lot of trauma, and that the council had a good record of getting Looked After Children into Higher Education.

Councillor Gatland MOVED the recommendations. This was SECONDED by Councillor Mario Creatura, put to the vote and:

RESOLVED, to:

Receive and note the Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report.

34/21 **Use of Special Urgency Procedures for Key Decisions Quarterly Report**

At commencement of the item, the Chair drew members' attention to an error in the report, which stated that the decision-maker for the urgent decision was the Cabinet Member for Planning and Regeneration. The report should have stated that the Executive Mayor was the decision-maker.

Members noted the correction and **RESOLVED**:

To note the use of Special Urgency for the key decision listed at section 3.4 of this report during the quarter July to October 2021/22.

35/21 **Mayor and Cabinet Questions**

Mayor Jason Perry, supported by members of the Cabinet, invited questions from Council on various topics affecting the borough. The Chair called upon councillors in turn and Mayor Perry responded that:

- The previous political administration had left legacy budgeting issues, preventing the delivery of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) scheme in many areas;
- That there was a £10million hole in the budget from expected parking income;
- That the Opening the Books exercise was demonstrating that further prohibitive measures would be needed before the council could reassess its spending;
- That a Public Space Protection Order had been implemented in areas which experienced high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour, and that the graffiti removal team had been reinstated in order to build back residents' pride in the area;
- The council had provided a discretionary support fund and a household support fund to support residents with the cost of living, and that information on those, as well as a benefits calculator, could be found on the updated Croydon council website;
- The Mayor was holding conversations with the Voluntary and Community sector to identify funding going forwards;
- A independent liaison officer had been appointed by the council to coordinate communication between the council and residents to ensure residents received support where necessary;
- Residents of the Regina Road block of council-provided housing had been engaged with at least twice by the Mayor, and future meetings with residents were planned;
- Issues with the procurement and contract management of bus shelters were being dealt with to ensure that previously removed bus shelters would be replaced;
- There were financial implications with using council-owned buildings as warm banks out of hours, but residents were welcome to access libraries and other public buildings whilst open during the cold months if they wanted to;
- The Early Years Partnership Strategy was approved and the council was working hard with schools to understand the issues around children not returning to school following remote learning that took place during the pandemic;
- Money loaned to other indebted councils was £10million and originated from the Pension Fund, and this had been recovered;

- Vulnerable residents who required assisted bin collections would continue to be supported and the council was conducting a data cleansing exercise to ensure that the service was accurate and contracts for the service could be properly managed;
- Healthy Start vouchers were administered by the NHS and links to request them were available on the council website;
- Hubs were being set up in the most deprived areas of the borough to tackle the digital exclusion problem;
- The revocation of the Suburban Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, SPD2, had ensure that more Planning applications were being refused and as a result developers were engaging more with the council for approval, and there was more consistency between decisions made by the Planning department and decisions made by the Committee on Planning applications;
- A new protocol for identifying and supporting rough sleepers was being put in place, as it was absent from the previous administration's work;
- The council was nearly at the point of delivery of the new Coulsdon Health Centre development;
- The South London Waste Partnership was looking into issues with pollution from a building raised in question by Councillor Humayun Kabir.

36/21 **Maiden Speeches**

The following councillors delivered their Maiden Speeches to Council:

- Cllr Simon Fox, representing Waddon Ward;
- Cllr Appu Dhamodaran, representing Norbury Park Ward;
- Cllr Esther Sutton, representing Fairfield Ward;
- Cllr Adele Benson, representing New Addington North Ward; and,
- Cllr Rowenna Davis, also representing Waddon Ward.

37/21 **Council Debate Motions**

The first Debate Motion was submitted by the Executive Mayor. Councillor Samir Dwesar MOVED and spoke in favour of the motion and argued that:

- The Campaign should not be needed in 2022, but that 39 per cent of councillors had experienced abuse and intimidation of protected characteristics;
- Debating and disagreeing was a healthy part of democracy but that abuse and intimidation were deterring people from stepping up as councillors, meaning the diversity of communities was not represented on all Councils;
- The group sought to strive towards a more inclusive political discourse.

The motion was SECONDED by Councillor Lara Fish who reserved her right to reply. Councillor Callton Young then spoke to the motion on behalf of the Opposition, stating that:

- A proactive approach to a more diverse Council would be welcome, and he knew of colleagues who were regularly abused especially online, which was exacerbated by the Government's austerity measures;
- The cost-of-living crisis made people angrier, which turned them against each other, including abuse misdirected at councillors;
- Diversity of Thought provided a justification for the status quo, leaving those with protected characteristics out of the most important political positions.

Councillor Janet Campbell also spoke on behalf of the Opposition group, stating that:

- Good standards of behaviour needed to be modelled within the Council;
- The motion was timely as it was Black History Month, and that abuse and intimidation was a deterrent for great individuals to stand for election;
- A listening exercise should be conducted between councillors to encourage the sentiment of this motion;
- That change had to begin within the Chamber.

Councillor Lara Fish then exercised her right to reply on behalf of the Executive Mayor, stating that:

- Debate was good for all, to determine the best way forward for residents;
- Council must never set out to undermine others, or descend into arguments or discrimination;

- There had been negative comments made during her campaign trail, and that they had been spat on whilst campaigning;
- Many people were deterred, especially women, from entering politics because of the abuse they feared facing;
- No one should fear abuse for representing communities;
- Councillors had to take exceptional measures to ensure their safety.

Councillor Young asked that for the record, that whilst he was going to vote to agree with the motion, he had concerns and reservations with the 'Diversity of Thought' element of the motion for the reasons stated.

The motion was then put to the vote, with Council voting UNANIMOUSLY in favour of the motion.

RESOLVED, to:

1. Endorse the LGA Debate Not Hate campaign and call on all political groups to sign the public statement;
2. Support the LGA's proposal for a national working group to produce and implement an action plan that addresses the abuse and intimidation of elected members and candidates and ensures their safety while they fulfil their democratic roles;
3. Assess how it can take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of its members, taking a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation and addressing the impacts of abuse on mental health and wellbeing.

Council then debated the motion submitted by the Labour Group which was MOVED by Councillor Maddie Henson who stated that:

- It was London Challenge Poverty Week, highlighting that poverty was a result of political choices, and that was why she worked for that charity;
- Funding for children in Early Education did not cover meals;
- One in three children grew up in poverty;
- 40 per cent of people were skipping meals to survive and one in five people on Universal Credit were not able to afford to use the cooker as the bills were too high;
- Children were not getting the nutrition they needed to enable them to learn;
- The motion only called for a detailed assessment.

Councillor Mike Bonello **SECONDED** the motion and reserved his right to speak. Councillor Alasdair Stuart then spoke to the motion on behalf of the Executive, stating that:

- All members shared the concerns expressed within the motion about the cost of living and pressures from inflation, but that the council was not in a financial position to provide what it asked for;
- That the previous administration had caused debt legacies meaning it could not afford many extra services;
- The motion provided no suggestion for how the proposal would be funded;
- Many cuts had to be made and support removed because of the financial decisions of the previous Labour administration.

Deputy Executive Mayor, Councillor Lynne Hale, then spoke to the motion, stating that:

- They shared the concerns about the impact on low-income families of the rising costs of living;
- It would be good to extend the provision of Free School Meals (FSM), but that the council did not have a choice about doing it, because of the overspending and over-borrowing of the previous Council administration;
- The council could do more to support struggling families to seek support that was already available, and that those most deprived children were supported by the council through the Household Support Fund, supermarket vouchers, and healthy food parcels.

Councillor Mike Bonello then stated that:

- It was important to support this motion as the best time for setting healthy eating habits was during the Early Years stage of children's development;
- FSM would help to address food insecurity;
- Addressing nutritional inequalities was now more important than ever;
- It could save families nearly £40 per month for families by giving all nursery age children free school meals;
- Hunger could negatively affect children's behaviour and learning;
- Rates of poverty were rising.

The motion was put to the vote and **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED, to:

1. Publish a detailed assessment of the issues and costs associated with an extension of Croydon's Free School meal offer to include all 3- and 4-year-olds in maintained nursery and primary schools in the Borough, and to do so by the end of November 2022; and,
2. That the Children and Young People scrutiny committee then considers the Mayor's assessment at its meeting in January 2023.

The meeting ended at 9.30 pm

Signed:

Date:

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