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Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 12 July 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall, Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Tony Pearson (Chair);

Councillors Appu Srinivasan, Kola Agboola, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Adele Benson, Margaret Bird, Claire Bonham, Mike Bonello, Simon Brew, Janet Campbell, Louis Carserides, Richard Chatterjee, Chris Clark, Sherwan Chowdhury, Stuart Collins, Mario Creatura, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Nina Degrads, Rowenna Davis, Samir Dwesar, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, 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, Karen Jewitt, Mark Johnson, Stuart King, Ola Kolade, Joseph Lee, Endri Llabuti, Enid Mollyneaux, Stella Nabukeera, Michael Neal, Tamar Barrett, Eunice O'Dame, Ian Parker, Ria Patel, Jason Perry, Ellily Ponnuthurai, Holly Ramsey, Chrishni Reshekaron, Scott Roche, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Nikhil Sherine Thampi, Luke Shortland, Andy Stranack, Aladair Stewart, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Jade Appleton, Sue Bennett, Danielle Denton, Lara Fish, Humayun Kabir and Helen Redfern

PART A

60/21 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 March, which included the amendments detailed in the agenda, and 17 May 2023 were agreed as accurate records.

61/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

Councillor Ria Patel, Green Party member, declared that she was an unpaid Director and Trustee of Croydon Pride, as during the section of the meeting on Questions to the Mayor and Cabinet Councillor Patel would be asking a question on behalf of the LGBTQIA+ Community.

62/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

63/21 Announcements

Councillor Tony Pearson, Chair of Council, informed members that a new board of trustees for the Mayoral Charities had been arranged, and that it was the Chair's intention to appoint members to the board of trustees for three-year terms to guarantee continuity.

The Chair also announced that there would be a curry night on 26 September at The Royal Tandoori in Selsdon to support the work of the Mayoral Charities.

64/21 Member Petitions

Council had received a petition from Councillor Chris Clark, Fairfield Ward, who stated that he supported the petition as the issue had been raised by the local residents and Residents Association for a number of years, and has been advised that they should carry out the enforcement work themselves.

Councillor Scott Roche, Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment, in response to the petition stated that enforcement was down to the metropolitan police force, but that he would discuss with the Highways team whether it was possible to carry out additional enforcement in the area where possible. The Cabinet Member also proposed to look into the possibility of putting a speed visor in the area.

65/21 Croydon Question Time

Public Questions

1. In response to the answer given and printed in the agenda, the questioner stated that rubbish collection at her residence had not been reliable, and asked whether the increase in Council Tax would contribute to improving this service.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Jason Cummings, stated that the increase in Council Tax was never intended to be spent on services; instead it was increased to ensure the council had sufficient funds to protect it from future financial difficulties.

2. In response to the answer given as printed in the agenda, the questioner asked a supplementary question, to which the Cabinet Member for Streets and Environment responded that the recycling of soft plastics should be increased by providing residents with greater awareness of where they can recycle these items. Councillor Roche also stated the council intended to promote responsible recycling at local level through communications campaigns and the use of QR codes, but that a lot of the waste contract was out of the council's control.
3. The third questioner was not present at the meeting, and so the answer to their question was published in the agenda and no supplementary question was asked.
4. The supplementary question regarding the investigation into financial mismanagement by previous members of the council and officers was responded to by Mayor Jason Perry who stated that he could not comment on how far the police had progressed the investigation but that the council would do everything it could to support the investigation.
5. The questioner asked a supplementary question based on the answer given in the agenda, asking the Council to commit to meeting with residents and Brick by Brick to ensure the company heard residents' concerns, to which the Cabinet Member for Finance replied the resident should get in touch directly with him so that the issue could be discussed with the relevant officers.

Mayor and Cabinet Questions

In response to questions, Mayor Jason Perry, assisted by Cabinet Members, stated that:

- The council was working closely with the head leaseholder of the Purley Pool site to reopen it;
- The LGBTQ population was supported during Pride month through London Borough of Culture events and respect was extended to members of the workforce belonging to the group as well as support being provided to residents;
- Discussions would take place with Councillor Bonham on the petition by Conservative MP Mark Eastward concerning changes to the legal

guidance on camera locations to improve road safety in areas of accident hotspots;

- There was no budget cap set in this year, assets were being sold quickly to pay down debts;
- The grass cutting service was not as good as expected; however, there was a need to rebuild the infrastructure around the service by bringing back equipment and staff;
- Westfield's acquisitions in the town centre and monthly Board meetings with the council were crucial steps in the town centre's regeneration;
- There was an expectation of a pre-planning discussion and a planning application, the master plan was undergoing finalisation;
- Violent crime was a top priority issue and there was a reset to the community safety partnership with a community board established to sit below the partnership;
- Work had been conducted on the Violence Against Women and Girls delivery plan and Youth Safety delivery plan; the Youth Safety delivery plan was used to tackle issues on Church Street resulting in some young people moving to other mentoring routes.
- The Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) had been in action for 2 months and the powers had been used 69 times;
- Working with community groups and police, training was in place to demonstrate how to use the powers effectively;
- There was a consultation on extending the PSPO to Thornton Heath and the Hotspot Delivery plan would be used to decide if other areas should be included;
- Service level agreements would be created from the Housing Revenue Account to the grass cutting service for housing estates, and this would be reviewed next year;
- By September 2023, councillors and residents would be engaged to discuss their expectations for the Local Plan; by December 2023, consultation on a renewed Local Plan for Croydon should begin;
- The loss of every ticket office was concerning to residents but only 10% of ticket sales occurred face to face; Mayor Perry's response to the consultation would ask for some strategic offices to remain available across the borough;
- Engagement with residents of Regina Road had taken place; the ballet process had occurred and an overwhelming yes to redevelop was received; a meeting was held with residents to discuss next steps and papers would be issued to Cabinet over the coming months;
- There was a commitment to hold former councillors and officers accountable for the financial damage to the Borough;
- The Penn report included information on decisions considered and agreed around the finances of the Borough;

- The **Kroll** reports provided details on the full investigation of the Fairfield Halls refurbishment and what happened to the £70 million that was invested;
- Two reports on public interests had been handed to the police and allegations were being investigated;
- The exit payment of the former Chief Executive was still being pursued for recovery;
- There were still outstanding issues at Fairfield Halls, but some issues had been dealt with;
- An update was requested from the responsible officers about the reopening of Wandle park café and the locking of gates at night; the Mayor would provide an update to the Waddon councillors once received;
- A Joint paper on Housing was produced to Cabinet on the 28th of June which looked at the provision of housing to young people; the objective was to set care experienced young people up for an independent life rather than putting them in debt and sub-standard housing;
- Apprenticeships would be reviewed as a method to encourage young people to aspire for full and independent lives;
- The Corporate Parenting Panel would assess the process of the new initiative, conduct a review in 6 months and the Panel would hear directly from affected young people to ensure that the new policies were working for them;
- The consultation on the expansion of the proposed area of the Public Space's Protection Order ended on the 21st of July and residents were encouraged to take part in the consultation to ensure their opinions were heard;
- An improvement plan would be developed to enhance, reallocate, and improve resources for the Planning department;
- The plan should improve performance within the department around enforcement issues, so that the needs and planning applications of residents and developers could be addressed in a timely manner;
- One million pounds of government funding was invested into the summer programme; a £50,000 bid was put in place for Purely and Thornton Heath and an additional £5,000 in funds was directed to Purely for transport interchanges.
- Work would remain ongoing with community groups to ensure that clubs would be open throughout the summer.
- A Community board was established and there had been great engagement. 26 groups attended the last board meeting, and a working relationship had been created with mentoring groups and the community and voluntary based sector to provide facilities to young people.

- 1,000 pieces of graffiti have been removed from highstreets, Councillor Roche and Mayor Perry have worked with Officers to provide deep clean processes in the centres so they can be restored for traders and shoppers. The service has delivered results.

66/21 Maiden Speeches

Council heard the Maiden Speeches of the following members:

- Councillor Mark Johnson, Shirley North Ward
- Councillor Enid Mollyneaux, Bensham Manor Ward
- Councillor Joseph Lee, Selsdon and Addington Village Ward
- Councillor Fatima Zaman, Selsdon Vale and Forestdale Ward

67/21 Appointments

No changes to Appointments were proposed.

68/21 Council Debate Motions

Moving the Conservative Group Debate Motion Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Homes, Councillor Lynne Hale, stated that the council had a long way to go but that it was taking difficult decisions to balance the books, transform services, and provide proper housing services.

Councillor Hale argued that the council was well on the way to doing less but doing better, which had been demonstrated by the improved Housing Transformation Programme, which involved proper engagement with residents, whom Councillor Hale thanked for the time and energy they had committed to the project.

On behalf of the Opposition, Councillor Callton Young, argued that the Mayor was unwilling to share his powers with his Cabinet and that was holding back progress. Councillor Young argued that the Mayor's key manifesto pledges had not been fulfilled, and that high street stores remained closed, and Purley Pool was yet to be reopened.

Councillor Alasdair Stewart, seconding the motion, stated that the programme of London Borough of Culture events taking place across Croydon this year were demonstrable of the improvements and enthusiasm of residents. Councillor Stewart also mentioned such successes as the plans for Westfield opening in the town centre, the Public Space Protection Orders that were in place, the plans for reopening Purley Pool, and the new approach to planning applications.

Councillor Stewart King, Leader of the Opposition, stated that on the contrary the situation for Croydon's residents had worsened, citing the 15% increase in Council Tax despite the recognised cost-of-living crisis, cuts to council services, the lack of Levelling-Up Funding, and failed manifesto pledges.

Exercising her right of reply, Councillor Hale argued that the Administration had delivered on balancing the budget, adopting the Mayor's Business Plan, brought back Westfield, restoring PSPOs, scrapped Planning guidelines which had brought misery to residents, restored the graffiti removal service, opposed the Ultra Low Emissions Zone, approved Early Years and anti-Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy, begun improvement work on the Regina Road estate, were putting in place a new waste and street cleansing contract, strengthening contract management and procurement, approved a strategy to tackle homelessness, were winding up Brick by Brick, and had agreed an asset disposal plan to recoup financial losses.

The Chair called Council to vote on the Motion, and member **RESOLVED**, with 31 votes in favour and 35 against, not to agree the motion.

Councillor Catherine Wilson then moved the Labour Group Motion, declaring that social work was not about box-ticking and meeting targets, but it was about ensuring the children in social care succeeded and had real prospects for achieving in life. Councillor Wilson spoke about how children in care struggled to get support, and that the system was designed against them. Councillor Wilson spoke about how she had seen young people denied services due to the care leaver status, and that they should be recognised as a vulnerable group.

Councillor Joseph Lee, on behalf of the Administration, stated that he and his colleagues had attended a number of events to gain a better understanding of the issues, and that they were doing all they could to navigate the legacy issues involved. Councillor Lee stated that it was important to recognise the wishes of the individual, and that a catch-all label for young people with these experiences was not always appropriate. Councillor Lee also mentioned the personal responsibility of members as Corporate Parents to ensure that vulnerable young people were afforded the same life opportunities as others.

Councillor Janet Campbell, seconding the motion, told members how she had proudly served as a foster carer, providing a nurturing and stable environment for children in need. Councillor Campbell described how she had experienced the lack of support and poor service provided to care-experience young people by the local authorities, and that she had known some young people who were told they needed to register as homeless before they were offered housing support. Councillor Campbell asserted that young people should be recognised as valuable and with potential to achieve, and that the council should uphold the principles of equality and fairness.

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Councillor Maria Gatland, asserted that the Corporate Parenting agenda was a top priority, and that Children’s Services must be improved to properly serve the borough’s care-experienced young people. Councillor Gatland informed members that a strategy had been developed which signals a whole-council approach, with plans for a care-experienced young person as the co-chair of a refreshed Corporate Parenting Panel. Councillor Gatland agreed to bring this motion to the Corporate Parenting Panel for consideration and to consult and listen to the needs of care leavers.

Councillor Wilson closed the debate, stating that there was no hidden agenda by the Corporate Parenting Panel of which she was a member; the members simply wanted the best outcomes for the borough’s care-experienced young people.

The Chair put the motion to the vote and Council **RESOLVED**, unanimously to support the motion.

In his final response to the outcome of the vote, Mayor Jason Perry agreed that supporting care leavers should be a priority, but stated that the reality was that this was not how the council had treated young people in the past. The Mayor stated that the current and future housing provision needed to be looked at, and that the council should be encouraging young people to become independent.

The meeting ended at 8.49 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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