

Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 22 May 2024 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Tony Pearson (Chair) and Councillor Kola Agboola (Chair)

Councillors Appu Srinivasan, Kola Agboola, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Adele Benson, Margaret Bird, Claire Bonham, Simon Brew, Janet Campbell, Richard Chatterjee, Chris Clark, Sherwan Chowdhury, Stuart Collins, Mario Creatura, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Nina Degrad, Rowenna Davis, Danielle Denton, Samir Dwesar, Lara Fish, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Amy Foster, Simon Fox, Gayle Gander, Maria Gatland, Brigitte Graham, Matt Griffiths, Lynne Hale, Jessica Hammersley-Rich, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson, Christopher Herman, Yvette Hopley, Mohammed Islam, Karen Jewitt, Mark Johnson, Humayun Kabir, 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, Andrew Price, Helen Redfern, Chrishni Reshekaron, Scott Roche, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Nikhil Sherine Thampi, Luke Shortland, Andy Stranack, Alasdair Stewart, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward, Callton Young and Fatima Zaman

Apologies: Councillors Sue Bennett, Louis Carserides, Clive Fraser, Holly Ramsey and Katerine Kerswell, The Chief Executive.

PART A

121/24 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

RESOLVED

The minutes of the Council meeting on 17 April 2024 were agreed as an accurate record subject to an amendment to correct the error in Councillor Matt Griffith's name.

122/24 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair of Council for the Municipal Year 2024-25

Before seeking nominations for the position of Chair and Vice-Chair of Council for the 2024-25 Municipal Year, the Civic Mayor reflected on the privilege and honour of serving and thanked various individuals and groups for their support and contributions, including the mayoral office, the concierge team, Democratic Services, Deputy Civic Mayor, Councillor Appu Srinivasan, the Board of Trustees, his Mayoress Maria Pearson, and his family. He expressed satisfaction with engaging local people, especially the youth, in council workings and history.

The Deputy Civic Mayor, Councillor Appu Srinivasan also expressed gratitude for the co-operation and support during his term. He thanked the Civic Mayor, community leaders, faith leaders, voluntary associations, and his family and reflected on the pride and optimism for Croydon's future and the trust placed in him.

Mayor Jason Perry nominated Councillor Kola Agboola as Chair of Council and Civic Mayor, and Councillor Richard Chatterjee as Vice-Chair of Council and Deputy Civic Mayor for the upcoming municipal year.

He Highlighted Councillor Agboola's commitment to faith, family, and education, particularly at Meridian High School and anticipated Councillor Agboola's effective leadership and focus on celebrating the talents and achievements of Croydon's residents.

In seconding the motion, the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stuart King, praised Councillor Agboola, highlighting his impactful presence in New Addington, where he had served since 2020, and noted his historic appointment as Croydon's first African Civic Mayor. Councillor King expressed confidence in Agboola's success and extended best wishes to Councillor Agboola and his consort, Helen, for a prosperous year of public service. Additionally, Councillor King supported the nomination of Councillor Richard Chatterjee as Deputy Civic Mayor, commending his courteous nature and expressing confidence in his ability to support Councillor Agboola effectively.

It was put to the vote and Council **RESOLVED**, unanimously to appoint Councillors Kola Agboola and Richard Chatterjee to the roles of Civic Mayor and Deputy Civic Mayor for the 2024-25 Municipal Year.

The Chair then retired to the parlour followed by the procession.

There was a short adjournment while Councillors Kola Agboola changed into the Mayoral robes, after which the Mayoral procession returned.

Councillor Kola Agboola then made and signed his declaration of acceptance of office before the Corporate Director for Finance, who was representing the Chief Executive. Councillor Richard Chatterjee also made and signed his declaration of acceptance of office before the Corporate Director for Finance.

Mayor Jason Perry commended Councillor Tony Pearson for his exceptional service as Civic Mayor, noting his promptness, efficiency, and dedication to the community, especially New Addington. Highlights of his term included leading civic events and raising over £25,000 for local charities. He said that Councillor Pearson's leadership was marked by fairness and firmness. Gratitude was also extended to his wife, Maria, for her support, and to Councillor Appu Srinivasan, who dedicated his role as Deputy Civic Mayor to his late mother and was praised for his advocacy for the Indian community. Both were thanked for their significant contributions to the community and council.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stuart King also praised Councillor Tony Pearson's exceptional service as Civic Mayor under Croydon's new governance system. Councillor Pearson, noted for his commitment to New Addington, displayed diligence, punctuality, and fairness in his role. Over the past year, he attended over 500 events and connected well with both veterans and young residents. He also highlighted unsung local volunteers through the Citizenship Awards. Councillor King also thanked Councillor Srinivasan, the Deputy Mayor, for his support and extensive engagement, reflecting their joint dedication to serving Croydon. Gratitude was expressed to both Councillors Pearson and Srinivasan for their contributions over the past year.

It was moved by the Chair, seconded by the Vice Chair and Council unanimously **RESOLVED** to:

“Formally express its gratitude to Councillor Tony Pearson for his courteous and efficient leadership over the past year. The Council acknowledges Pearson's dignified execution of mayoral duties, his and his wife Maria's support for local organizations, and their active participation in the borough's social life. The resolution be formally recorded, sealed, and presented to him at the Annual Council.”

The Chair then presented the past Civic Mayor's Badge and Consort badge to Councillor Pearson and Maria Pearson respectively and presented flowers to Councillor Appu Srinivasan and Karthika Srinivasan.

In his acceptance speech, the Chair said he was honoured to be the Civic Mayor of Croydon, a diverse and vibrant London borough. He noted that this role was historic and a personal achievement as he was the first African and fourth Black person to hold the office. He mentioned that Croydon had been his home since migrating from Nigeria. He highlighted his career as a Senior Technician at Kingston University, which enabled him to support students in achieving their potential. His passion for community and representation led

him into politics, and he was elected as a councillor in 2021 and re-elected in 2022.

He thanked Mayor Jason Perry, Opposition Leader, Councillor Stuart King, and his fellow councillors for their support and promised to work impartially. He also expressed gratitude to his family, especially his wife Helen, who would serve as Civic Mayoress, supported by their two children (Dr Bernadette Agboola and Miss Deborah Agboola). He looked forward to working with Deputy Mayor Councillor Richard Chatterjee.

The Chair announced that his mayoral theme would be "Communities Together and Mental Health." He would support two local charities: the Family Centre, which aids families through various support services, and Night Watch, which assists homeless people. He pledged to engage with community, voluntary, and charitable groups and to serve Croydon's residents with enthusiasm, compassion, and dedication.

In his acceptance speech, the Deputy Civic Mayor expressed his gratitude for being nominated to serve in the role. He thanked his colleagues across the chamber and the residents of Shirley North Ward, whom he represents alongside Councillors Sue Bennett and Mark Johnson. Reflecting on his extensive tenure as a councillor since 2002 and despite nearly three decades of council service, he had maintained consistent attendance at meetings.

He shared personal details about his upbringing and education in Croydon. He pursued a career in pharmacy and served as an NHS hospital pharmacist and civil servant for over 39 years. Drawing parallels between himself and the new Civic Mayor, he noted commonalities such as overseas roots, scientific backgrounds, and active involvement in trade unions and churches.

Acknowledging his family's support, he recognised his wife Angela as his Deputy Civic Mayoress for the year. He anticipated discovering new aspects of Croydon and building on the impact of his predecessor. He expressed his commitment to serving all residents, organisations, and businesses of Croydon in his role as Deputy Civic Mayor.

124/24 **Political Balance of the Council and Composition of Committees**

The Chair moved the amended recommendations. Councillor Luke Shortland seconded the motion and Council **RESOLVED** to:

- 2.1** Note that the Council was comprised of 34 Labour Group members, 34 Conservative Group members (including the Executive Mayor), two Green Group members, and one Liberal Democrat member; and,

2.2 Agree the size of committees and the allocation of seats on committees as set out in the report subject to the following amendments to paragraph 6.2 of the report:

1. The 12 seats available on the Licensing Committee would be allocated as follows:

- Conservative Group: - 6
- Labour Group: - 6
- Green Group - 0
- Lib Dem Independent Member - 0

2. The 7 seats available on the Audit and Governance Committee would be allocated as follows:

- Conservative Group: - 2
- Labour Group: - 3
- Green Group - 1
- Lib Dem Independent Member – 1.

125/24 **Appointments**

The Chair moved the recommendations as contained in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Luke Shortland, and Council **RESOVED** to:

2.1 Make appointments to committees giving effect to the wishes of the relevant political groups as set out in Appendix A to this report, where political balance rules apply;

2.2 Make appointments to other committees, panels, working groups, boards and outside bodies as set out in Appendix B to this report;

2.3 Agree the suspension of paragraph 2.3 of the Non-Executive Procedure Rules (Part 4F of the Constitution) for the 2023/24 municipal year;

2.4 Wherever applicable, to appoint Chairs and Vice/Deputy-Chairs and substitutes to those non-executive committees detailed in Appendix A to this report, without prejudice to the provisions set out in paragraph 2.4 of Part 4F of the Constitution, which would continue to apply

enabling in-year vacancies to either the Chair or Vice/Deputy-Chair to be filled by election at the first meeting of the relevant committee or sub-committee, following notification to the Monitoring Officer;

2.5 Receive, for information, the following executive appointments made by the directly elected Mayor;

i) The appointments of Cabinet Members, Cabinet Committees and Deputy Cabinet Members (as appropriate) (Appendix A);

ii) The appointments to Joint Committees (as appropriate) (Appendix A);

iii) The appointments to London Councils Committees (as appropriate) and panels and Local Government Association bodies (Appendix B); and,

2.6 Receive, for information:

i) The appointments by the directly elected Mayor to those outside bodies, which relate to the exercise of an executive function (marked (*) as detailed in Appendix B);

ii) The appointments of Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Cabinet (Appendix A); and,

iii) The appointments of political party group officers (Appendix A).

126/24 **The Executive Mayor's Scheme of Delegation**

Mayor Jason Perry informed Council that there would be an amendment to his Scheme of Delegation and it would mark a shift towards a more positive phase of service delivery after addressing inherited challenges. He stated that under the updated scheme, future Cabinet meetings would include votes for Cabinet members at the conclusion of relevant agenda items.

He stated that this change signified the Council's progress from crisis management towards normal operations. Mayor Perry expressed anticipation for the transformation of services and indicated that details of the updated scheme would be shared with all Members soon.

127/24 **The Mayor's Annual Statement**

Mayor Jason Perry presented his annual statement to Council and expressed satisfaction with the progress made so far. He highlighted efforts to address the Council's financial challenges and provide strong governance, resulting in positive recognition from the government. Mayor Perry emphasised the transformational steps taken, including amendments to the scheme of delegation to enhance Council operations. He outlined achievements in housing, economic partnerships, and community engagement, underscoring ongoing efforts to rebuild trust and improve services.

He stated that one of the major achievements was that, despite financial challenges, the debt had been kept stable and Croydon had even operated under budget for the past financial year due to careful spending plans. He also listed the following as a few of the achievements over the last year:

- The introduction of Blitz Clean-up Campaigns both in Norbury and Thornton Heath.
- New playgrounds across the borough apart the playground investment with four to five new ones every year.
- Reintroduction of the Public Space Protection Order in Thornton Heath.
- The Launch of a Young Entrepreneurs Academy,
- Commissioning the resident survey and publication of the results.
- Actively supporting the development of family hubs. The development of a three-year plan to tackle violence against women and girls. Several grants to outreach youth programmes.
- The launch of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the Joint Protocol with Housing to support Croydon's care experienced young people.
- The publication of the Dementia Strategy and Action Plan
- The introduction of the Housing Strategy and development of the suite of strategies that sit below it.
- A planning application received for a new leisure centre on the Purley Pool site and the regeneration of the surrounding area.
- Partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association and Greenwich Leisure to revive 32 courts across 14 parks and four new all-weather cricket pitches in partnership with English Cricket.

Mayor Perry further stated that the Deputy Mayor for Business in London, Howard Dawber, had highlighted during a recent visit that Croydon was a top investment priority due to its substantial potential. Additionally, he reported that the establishment of an Economic Growth Charter with London Gatwick, which had contributed £265 million to Croydon's economy in 2023 and created over 3,600 local jobs. He expressed his anticipation of more agreements like this in the future.

He said that according to the latest report from the Improvement and Assurance Panel, the Chairman noted significant advancements across various domains, such as financial management, governance, and the enhancement of council housing. This progress was achieved amidst challenges like increasing costs and the growing demand for services, particularly in supporting vulnerable children and adults. The panel specifically praised the dedication to addressing financial issues and highlighted resolute decision-making in achieving these goals. Furthermore, the report acknowledged that strategic appointments to the Council's senior leadership team had positively influenced the organization's culture.

Mayor Perry reaffirmed his commitment to transparency and accountability, promising continued dedication to Croydon's residents and future development.

The Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Stuart King, responding to the Mayor's Annual Statement acknowledged the progress made so far while also highlighting ongoing challenges. He acknowledged the resolution and determination shown by all parts of the authority in attempting to fix the council's finances, highlighting the efforts of the political and managerial leadership as well as the role played by all members, including colleagues on scrutiny.

Councillor King emphasised the need for the Council to support residents effectively, especially during the cost of living crisis, and he said a vision was needed to address the basics such as cleanliness and service accessibility.

Councillor King welcomed the publication of the Council's Transformation Strategy because he believed that transforming the way the Council delivered services was one of the key ingredients necessary to ensure the Croydon's return to a place of independent financial stability but stressed the need for a clear vision for Croydon's future beyond basic services.

Councillor King noted that while the leadership had a vision for Croydon Council, a well-articulated vision for Croydon as a place was needed. He expressed a desire for the mayoral system to flourish and succeed, emphasising that its success was tied to the town's success. However, argued that the vision for the borough must go beyond merely delivering basic services. He closed by calling on the Executive Mayor to leverage his considerate personal mandate to create and deliver a comprehensive vision for Croydon involving key stakeholders.

The meeting ended at 7.47pm

Signed:

Date:

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