

Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 9 October 2024 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Kola Agboola (Chair);
Councillor Richard Chatterjee (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Adele Benson,
Margaret Bird, Claire Bonham, Simon Brew, Janet Campbell,
Louis Carserides, Chris Clark, Sherwan Chowdhury, Stuart Collins,
Mario Creatura, Jason Cummings, Nina Degrad, Danielle Denton,
Samir Dwesar, Lara Fish, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Clive Fraser,
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, Tony Pearson,
Ellily Ponnuthurai, Andrew Price, Helen Redfern, Chrisni Reshekaron,
Nikhil Sherine Thampi, Luke Shortland, Andy Stranack, Alasdair Stewart,
Appu Srinivasan, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward,
Callton Young and Fatima Zaman

Apologies: Councillor Patsy Cummings, Rowenna Davis, Jason Perry, Holly Ramsey,
Scott Roche and Manju Shahul-Hameed

The Monitoring Officer informed Council that the Deputy Executive Mayor,
Councillor Lynne Hale, would be standing in for the Executive Mayor,
Councillor Jason Perry for this meeting.

PART A

144/24 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 17th July 2024 were agreed as an
accurate record.

145/24 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

146/24 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

147/24 **Announcements**

The Chair, Cllr Kola Agboola, in opening the meeting, acknowledged the passing of the former Councillors of Croydon Council:

- Councillor T. Ward: Served Sanderstead Ward (1971-1978).
- Councillor Graham Pass: Served as Mayor (2011-2012) and councillor for Purley Ward for 20 years.

On behalf of Full Council, condolences were extended to their families and a minute's silence was observed.

The Chair during his then welcomed the following members of the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge Group to Full Council:

- Lead Member Peer – Cllr Kevin Bentley, Leader, Essex Council (Conservative)
- Member Peer – Cllr Simon Henig, serving councillor and former Leader, Durham County Council (Labour)- confirmed

The Chair also highlighted recent and upcoming civic and mayoral events, including:

- Flag Raisings: For Bi-Visibility Day, Nigerian and Ugandan Independence Days.
- Black History Month: Theme "Reclaiming Narratives" emphasises Black excellence and equity.
- Civic Engagements: Includes commemorative events for the Arnhem Airbourne 80th anniversary commemoration and upcoming remembrance ceremonies.
- 1st memorial anniversary for Kai Pokawa – was held in the Braithwaite Hall on 29 August.
- Wake for Alderman Graham Bass (former Councillor and Civic Mayor) – was held in the Braithwaite Hall on 30 August.
- The Interfaith Remembrance Event – will be held on 7 November in the Braithwaite Hall

He informed Council that the dates for the following Charity Events would be circulated once confirmed:

- African/ Caribbean Dinner in late October

- Fish & Chips in November
- Multi-Faith Dinner in December

The Deputy Executive Mayor, in her announcement, highlighted the following:

- Local Government Association Peer Review: she commended the Peer Review Team for their assessment and support in advancing Croydon's progress.
- Community Resilience: She reflected on the community's strength in the face of recent losses, including the unveiling of a mural in memory of Elianne Andam to promote anti-violence awareness and the tribute paid to Sergeant Matt Ratana's service and sacrifice through the unveiling of a memorial.
- Housing and Support: She noted the allocation of £3 million from the Household Support Fund, which has benefitted over 29,000 households.
- Addressed challenges in homelessness, including rising costs of temporary accommodation and progress in reducing split households from 206 to 100 cases and celebrated the successful move of residents into Red Clover Gardens.
- Diversity and Inclusion: she recognised Croydon's rich cultural diversity and the importance of Black History Month, emphasising equality pledges and the significant contributions of the African and Caribbean communities

148/24 **Croydon Question Time**

Question 1:

The questioner was unable to attend the meeting. In accordance with the Constitution the Chair proposed that a written response be sent via email and published in the minutes.

Question 2:

In response to a supplementary question about the unreliability of Wi-Fi and its impact. Deputy Mayor Lynne Hale reiterated that server issues were being actively investigated. Councillor Robert Ward further emphasised the rarity of such errors and the ongoing efforts to resolve them.

Question 3:

In response to a supplementary question requesting clarity on whether the risk assessment findings would be included in the Council's Risk Register, the Deputy Mayor Hill assured that inequalities were a central consideration and suggested posing the question after the revised plan was published.

Question 4:

The questioner was absent. In accordance with the Constitution, the Chair proposed that a written response be sent via email and published in the minutes.

Question 5:

In response, to a question on the extent of the Executive Mayor's powers in relation to public opposition on parking and library closures, the Deputy Mayor explained the decision-making rationale, noting constraints such as budget limitations. She emphasised efforts to mitigate challenges and highlighted ongoing initiatives like co-located library services.

Question 6:

The questioner was unable to attend the meeting. In accordance with the Constitution the Chair proposed that a written response be sent via email and published in the minutes.

149/24 **The Croydon Debate**

Councillor Esther Sutton presented a Member Petition advocating for a Pelican crossing at the Lower Coombe Street, High Street, Southend, and Coombe Road Junction. She emphasised:

- The dangerous nature of the crossing, citing personal experiences and near-miss incidents.
- Broad public support, including signatures from over 1,000 individuals.
- Identified funding streams for the project.

The lead petitioner, Marz King, reiterated the following points:

- The crossing's collision rate exceeds the London average, with two serious accidents and four minor incidents in the past five years.
- Concerns about the safety of children, disabled individuals, and pedestrians in the area.
- A safer crossing would encourage sustainable travel and support Croydon's climate goals.
- Requests included installing sound-enabled crossing lights and exploring short-term solutions like employing a crossing guard.

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Lynne Hale, acknowledged the concerns raised and noted the following:

- Recent site inspections have been conducted by council officers.
- Traffic signals at the location are managed by TfL, which evaluates accident data and traffic flow before implementing pedestrian phases.
- Six road traffic collisions were reported at the junction over the past three years, one involving a pedestrian.
- Croydon Council had formally requested TfL to enhance pedestrian facilities at the junction and will reinforce this at the next TfL liaison meeting.

- The council was open to discussing grant opportunities with petitioners to advance the project.

150/24 **Reports to Council**

The Chair moved, it was seconded by Councillor Luke Shortland and Council **RESOLVED to** suspend procedural rules (Part 4A, Paragraph 3.7) to consider Item 10, Appointments, before Item 8, Reports to Council.

151/24 **Appointment of Independent Person - Ethics Committee**

The recommendations as contained in the report were **MOVED** by the Chair, **SECONDED** by Councillor Luke Shortland, and Council **RESOLVED**, unanimously:

That Joanne Middlewick be appointed as an Independent Person as recommended by the Ethics Committee for the duration of 2 years, with a possible extension of 2 years.

152/24 **Scrutiny and Overview Committee Annual Report 2023-24**

The new Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Councillor Leila Ben-Hassell presented the Committee's annual report. She began by thanking her predecessor, Councillor Rowenna Davis, for her dedication to the role and commitment to incorporating residents' voices into the committee's work. She pledged to continue this focus as the new Chair and rely on her experience as Deputy Chair to ensure a smooth transition.

Councillor Leila Ben-Hassell emphasised key points from the report:

1. Council Tax Arrears Communication: Recommendations to improve clarity and support in arrears letters to alleviate residents' stress.
2. Housing: Staff training on domestic abuse as a long-term benefit for council housing services.
3. Health: Engagement with the Secretary of State on the relocation of children's cancer care services.

She identified financial oversight and scrutiny of the Council's transformation agenda as priorities for the coming year, noting the evolving nature of the transformation programme. Councillor Ben-Hassell also thanked committee members and officers for their contributions and collaboration.

In accordance with the Constitution, Members asked questions for 10 minutes and received the following answers:

Councillor Mario Creatura asked which scrutiny recommendations could result in the largest savings. Councillor Ben-Hassell highlighted the transformation agenda as the primary source of potential savings but noted insufficient detail to assess the full impact at this stage.

Councillor Matt Griffiths inquired about governance improvements. Councillor Ben-Hassell pointed to better data monitoring, access to timely information, and the rollout of the Oracle system. She highlighted ongoing capacity challenges and the importance of the Target Operating Model to achieve long-term governance improvements.

Councillor Ria Patel questioned scrutiny's role in accelerating climate action. Councillor Ben-Hassell stressed scrutiny's role in reviewing and challenging existing plans and assured robust oversight of future proposals.

Councillor Margaret Bird asked how scrutiny ensures ongoing improvement. Councillor Ben-Hassell referenced progress in data quality, cross-party collaboration, and efforts to integrate residents' voices. She emphasised the importance of public engagement and ongoing collaboration with officers.

Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice raised concerns about the low rate of accepted recommendations. Councillor Ben-Hassell noted a drop to 30% acceptance due to the introduction of a "progressing" category. She emphasised joint training to improve collaboration on recommendations.

Councillor Claire Bonham sought clarity on scrutiny's ability to evaluate the transformation programme. Councillor Ben-Hassell acknowledged the challenges of assessing progress due to limited detail but stressed regular reviews of savings targets and individual departmental proposals.

Councillor Michael Neal asked about the Chair's priorities. Councillor Ben-Hassell committed to enhancing resident engagement, improving training, and fostering productive relationships with officers.

Councillor Alisa Flemming asked about progress in housing. Councillor Ben-Hassell highlighted improvements, including the pace of Regina Road regeneration, better data management, and the rollout of the NEC system. She acknowledged that challenges remained in homelessness prevention, responsive repairs, disrepair cases, and the development of a robust Housing Revenue Account business plan.

In conclusion, Councillor Ben-Hassell reaffirmed the Scrutiny Committee's commitment to robust oversight and collaboration to ensure effective decision-making and better outcomes for residents. She emphasised the importance of sustained progress in housing, transformation, and governance improvements.

RESOLVED:

To note the Scrutiny and Overview Committee Annual Report 2023-24.

Audit and Governance Committee Annual Report 2023-24

In his presentation, the Independent Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, Dr Olu Olasode, highlighted that 2023/24 was the second full operational year of the committee. He explained the committee's focus on robust and independent challenges in audit, assurance, risk management, financial control, and governance frameworks.

He said that the primary aim was to restore confidence and trust in the Council's management by transitioning from poor to best practices and the Committee emphasised improving cultural compliance, budgetary control, and governance, aiming to demonstrate value for money and meet best value duties.

He outlined efforts to ensure the Council effectively managed risks tied to its improvement and transformation plan and adopt a more outcome-focused structure for the committee's report was introduced, highlighting assurances and impacts instead of mere activities.

Development initiatives included strengthened effectiveness through member development, enhanced relationships with scrutiny bodies, and benchmarking best practices. He noted the ongoing challenge of signing off the 2019-2020 accounts, citing necessary corrections and discussions with auditors.

Dr Olasode mentioned the external audit arrangements initiated by the Minister of State for Local Government and promised updates in subsequent reports. He expressed gratitude for the support and work of officers and Members from all political groups.

The recommendations were seconded, followed by a ten-minute Question Time. Where the following responses were given in response to Questions by Members:

Dr Olasode stated that joint meetings enhanced the governance process by aligning scrutiny and the committee's activities towards high-risk areas.

He elaborated on improvements, such as using the risk management framework to guide strategic decision-making and future plans included testing the framework's effectiveness in alignment with the Council's strategic goals.

On the Public Audit Periods, he noted ongoing discussions regarding government deadlines and assured that the committee would provide updates once the process was clarified.

He stated that additional measures for addressing non-compliance: included escalation mechanisms through the Corporate Management Team and Internal Control Board, with ongoing testing to ensure effectiveness.

Dr Olasode indicated ongoing engagement with financial challenges and medium-term financial strategies but stated that certain updates would require further committee discussions and referred to the Annual Governance Statement as a key tool in monitoring and addressing governance improvements, emphasising a cultural shift within the Council.

RESOLVED:

To note the Annual Report of the Audit and Governance Committee attached as Appendix 1.

153/24 **Questions to Mayor and Executive**

In response to questions, the Deputy Executive Mayor Councillor Lynne Hale, assisted by Cabinet Members, stated the following:

Library Closures and Resident Consultation:

- The importance of consulting residents while managing financial constraints, noting priorities such as safety, housing, and financial stability.
- The library transformation consultation had been extensive, spanning 15-18 months and involving over 40 public events to ensure residents' feedback was incorporated.

Budget Management and Overspend:

- There were outlined strategies to ensure a balanced budget, including departmental reviews and recovery plans for areas like homelessness and SEN transport, with a focus on sustainable financial planning and avoiding the use of general fund reserves.
- Ongoing controls and early savings from transformation programs were confirmed and the importance of the autumn financial statement for clarity stressed
- Commitment to transparency was affirmed, the "open book" approach and the publication of a financial strategy were noted and sector-wide pressures acknowledged.

Minority Opposition Group Representation:

- That representation rights followed the Council's constitution and further discussions with the Monitoring Officer was suggested as the Green Group was overrepresented compared to its Council seat allocation.

Affordable Housing and Planning Issues:

- Planning requirement failures were cited as reason for the refusal of a community-led planning application, but progress had been made in acquiring housing, such as Red Clover Gardens.
- The Deputy Executive Mayor offered to meet with the Community Land Trust for possible solutions to advance the planning application.

Financial Overspend and Mayor's Commitments:

- There were ongoing recovery efforts in key areas and the commitment to financial stability was emphasised
- There were improved forecasts regarding overspends although challenges remained.

Winter Fuel Allowance Impact:

- It was confirmed that 43,000 pensioners in Croydon could lose their winter fuel payments, disproportionately affecting low-income individuals and which could lead to added strain on Council support systems and reconsideration was urged at the national level.

Mental Health Initiatives and Support:

- Initiatives stemming from a mental health summit, including collaborations with health groups and the BME Forum were outlined. The Council's commitment to mental health support was reaffirmed. Efforts would be made to renew engagement with Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) volunteers to utilise their skills effectively.

Impact of VAT on Private School Fees:

- Concerns were expressed over the proposed VAT on private school fees, highlighting inadequate planning and potential strain on local schools and education systems. It was agreed that impact assessment and consultation were needed before formalising the policy.

Homelessness and Nightwatch Collaboration:

- The valuable work of the Nightwatch Charity was acknowledged and it was confirmed that there were no plans for legal action against them. The Council was committed to working closely with the charity and other partners in addressing homelessness and rough sleeping.

CCTV in Croydon:

- Improvements to Croydon's CCTV system, include the introduction of a more responsive, digital system and the planned deployment of rapid cameras in key hotspots.
- There was strong support for expanding the Safe Haven program initiated by youth in New Addington, and commitment to supporting youth-led safety initiatives.

Transformation Programme Funding:

- The pace of the transformation programme, and its flexible allocation across financial years ensure efficiency and Croydon's transformation efforts were being recognised for progress at London Councils.
- A whole-Council approach to managing surging service demands and ensuring that savings initiatives were brought forward was emphasised.

Council Tax Single Occupancy Discount:

- Concerns were expressed about the potential removal of the single occupancy council tax discount and the unfair impact it could have on pensioners. Clarity was needed from the government on the matter.
- Discretionary support for those in extreme hardship would continue despite the governments 's decision

Littering and Fly-Tipping in Selhurst Ward:

- Issues of littering and fly-tipping in Selhurst Ward were acknowledged and assurances given that concerns would be reviewed and addressed.
- Following up on earlier meetings, Councillor Scott Roche would take further action on the issues raised by Selhurst residents.
At this point, it was MOVED by the Chair, SECONDED by Councillor Luke Shortland, and Council **RESOLVED**, unanimously to extend the closing time of the meeting by 30 minutes to allow for the consideration of Item 11 Council Debate Motions.

Violence Against Women and Girls Plan:

- The Deputy Mayor reflected on the emotional tribute to Ellie Anne, a victim of knife crime, and outlined the continued commitment to Croydon's Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Delivery Plan. The plan emphasised prioritising victims' voices, with ongoing efforts to enhance safety and prevent further tragedies.

- Councillor Kolade added that early intervention and educational outreach on healthy relationships were key components of the plan, with further progress still needed.

Waste Management Contract:

- Although only one bid was received at the final stage, the process started with four bidders and involved competitive dialogue. The contract management team would oversee continuous improvements to ensure value for money.
- The option of an in-house bid had been considered but ultimately rejected by the Cabinet.

154/24 **Appointments**

Conservative Group Announcements:

Councillor Luke Shortland, Chief Whip of the Conservative Group, announced no changes to appointments.

Labour Group Announcements:

Councillor Catherine Wilson, Chief Whip of the Labour Group, announced the following changes:

- Chair of Scrutiny Overview: Councillor Leila Ben-Hassell.
- Chair of Scrutiny and Homes Sub-Committee: Councillor Ellily Ponnuthurai
- Labour group Chief Whip - Councillor Catherine Wilson.

The Chair moved, it was seconded, and Council **RESOLVED** to approve the changes to the Labour Group appointments.

155/24 **Council Debate Motions**

Before the commencement of this item, Councillor Ria Patel raised a Point of Order, she invoked paragraph 117 of Part 4A of the Constitution, requesting equal time for all groups to speak on two motions under debate. She cited paragraph 3.61 of Part 4A of the Council Procedure Rules, emphasising the importance of representing residents in a public meeting and criticised restrictions on minority group participation.

The Civic Mayor clarified that, according to the Constitution, only majority groups (Labour and Conservative) were entitled to speak on these motions.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed the constitutional provision allowing only majority groups to debate motions and stated that previous advice had been provided to councillors on this issue, including discussions in the Constitutional Working Group and advised that the meeting proceed in accordance with the current rules.

The Civic Mayor upheld the Monitoring Officer's advice, and the meeting continued under the prescribed procedure.

Conservative Group Motion

Councillor Luke Shortland proposed the motion opposing the Government's planned cut to the winter fuel allowance. The motion highlighted the impact on pensioners earning as little as £13,000 annually, with an estimated 40,000 pensioners in Croydon would be affected.

Councillor Luke Shortland criticised the Government for targeting vulnerable pensioners with the unexpected cuts and urged all councillors to support the motion and demonstrate solidarity with pensioners.

Councillor Janet Campbell attributed the need for difficult financial decisions to the UK's economic state and advocated for the Government's broader strategy of energy efficiency and renewable investments to tackle rising bills.

Councillor Yvette Hopley emphasised the devastating impact on vulnerable pensioners, including increased health risks and pressure on local services and condemned Labour MPs for voting in favour of the cut despite evidence of severe consequences.

Councillor Stuart King, the Leader of the Opposition, defended the Government's decision as part of broader efforts to manage inherited economic challenges.

Councillor Luke Shortland in closing reiterated that the motion focused solely on whether to support the cut, calling for councillors to prioritise Croydon Residents.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

RESOLVED that:

"Council does not support the Labour Government's cut to the Winter Fuel Payment"

In response to the Debate and decision, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Lynne Hale, expressed gratitude to those supporting the motion, emphasising the strong opposition to the Government's decision and confirmed that the Council would write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to urge reconsideration of the cuts.

Labour Group Motion

Councillor Nina Degrades introduced the motion, emphasising the pivotal role libraries play in supporting all segments of the community. She highlighted the adverse impacts of proposed closures, particularly on vulnerable groups, and questioned their justification given the lack of financial savings. She called for

the rejection of library closures, citing libraries as safe spaces, study environments, and hubs for essential community support.

Councillor Andy Stranack opposing the motion, outlined plans to transform the library service, presenting it as a solution to address underperformance. He argued that:

- Current services reach less than 10% of residents.
- Proposed changes would include increased opening hours, outreach programs, and an accessible library bus service.

He criticised the motion for lacking alternative solutions and urged members to oppose it to support modernised and expanded library access.

Councillor Stuart Collins, who seconded the motion spoke in support of the motion, focusing on the importance of Broad Green Library as a community asset. He highlighted its role in hosting programs, preserving cultural heritage, and combating crime, emphasising its value to a disadvantaged area with limited resources.

Councillor Tony Pearson dismissed the motion as political deflection, highlighting the mismanagement of the library service in the past. He endorsed the transformation plans, praising them for increasing accessibility and better serving residents.

Councillor Nina Degrades, in exercising her right of last reply, reiterated that the closures would harm vital community lifelines. She cited public opposition to the plans and urged the Council to suspend closures and explore alternatives to retain the libraries.

The motion was put to the vote and was carried.

RESOLVED that:

This Council celebrates both the role libraries play in the wonder of reading and their wider role as a home to community groups, a refuge from loneliness and a safe, warm place to study - particularly for the many residents who can't find these things in their own home.

This Council notes that 66% of residents to the Council's own consultation oppose the planned closures and the Council itself has stated that the changes are not intended or projected to save money.

This Council understands that residents are justifiably angry at these changes being forced upon them while community groups have little faith in the Mayor's vague 'mitigation plans'.

This Council notes the Mayor promised in his manifesto that he would "listen to Croydon" but is now ignoring the voices of both residents and community groups.

This Council does not support the closure of four of the borough's libraries.

Full Council resolves that the Mayor should suspend his decision to close the libraries at Broad Green, Shirley, Sanderstead and Bradmore Green in order to find a way to retain these libraries as part of a revamped library service.'

The Deputy Mayor, Councillor Lynne Hale expressed disappointment with the debate, emphasising the Council's commitment to modernising library services. She outlined key improvements, including extended opening hours, increased activities, and no budget cuts arguing that the proposals addressed systemic issues and stated that pausing the plans would not offer new solutions.

The meeting ended at 9.47 pm

Signed:

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Date:

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