

# Public Document Pack

## Council

Meeting held on Monday, 29 March 2021 at 6.30 pm. This meeting was held remotely; to view the meeting, please click [here](#).

## MINUTES

**Present:** Councillor Maddie Henson (Chair);  
Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Vice-Chair);  
Councillors Hamida Ali, Muhammad Ali, Jamie Audsley, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Simon Brew, Alison Butler, Jan Buttinger, Janet Campbell, Robert Canning, Richard Chatterjee, Luke Clancy, Chris Clark, Pat Clouder, Stuart Collins, Mary Croos, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Mario Creatura, Nina Degrads, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Felicity Flynn, Clive Fraser, Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Simon Hoar, Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Humayun Kabir, Bernadette Khan, Shafi Khan, Stuart King, Toni Letts, Oliver Lewis, Stephen Mann, Stuart Millson, Vidhi Mohan, Michael Neal, Steve O'Connell, Oni Oviri, Ian Parker, Andrew Pelling, Helen Pollard, Tim Pollard, Joy Prince, Badsha Quadir, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Pat Ryan, Paul Scott, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Robert Ward, David Wood, Louisa Woodley and Callton Young

**Apologies:** Councillor Jason Perry

## PART A

### 21/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

### 22/21 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

### 23/21 **Announcements**

#### **Madam Mayor**

Madam Mayor gave her announcements to the Members of Council.

Madam Mayor wished everyone a happy Autism Week.

Members were reminded of the Fostering Team's campaign to recruit new foster carers and that the team had reached out to all ward councillors for their support in promoting the campaign.

Madam Mayor confirming that her final two events were coming up. Firstly an online panel discussion on the issues faced when coming out. Madam Mayor expressed her thanks to all those taking part especially to the Council's LGBTQ Network. Secondly the Baby and Toddler Festival mentioned at the last meeting.

Madam Mayor reminded members that her last fundraising event is coming and requested that as many members as possible please attend her replacement Gala Dinner which has been replaced by a "Murder Mystery" evening on Zoom.

Madam Mayor's announcements were concluded by wishing the Bangladeshi community a Happy 50th Anniversary of Independence following her attendance at the virtual event held at the Bangladesh High Commission.

### **The Leader**

Madam Mayor invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali, to make her announcements.

The Leader stated her deep concern for the situation of the residents in Regina Road which was completely unacceptable. She had apologised publicly including to the Government Select Committee and did so again. She also gave her commitment to put things right. In addition she has referred the council to the Health and Safety Executive and the Regulator for Social Housing and set up an externally led investigation which will give a verbal report next week.

The Leader stated that she could not support the opposition motion until the findings of the investigation have been completed.

## **24/21 Croydon Question Time**

### **Public Questions**

Madam Mayor explained that Croydon Question Time would commence with 30 minutes of public questions to the Leader and Cabinet Members. In accordance with advice from the Government and Public Health England, it was not possible to hold public meetings in the Town Hall. As a result, members of the public were unable to ask questions from the public gallery in the Council Chamber. Questions have been received by email up until 12 noon on Friday 26 March 2021.

Madam Mayor read a question from Ria Patel to the meeting:

*“1. How many homeless people are there in Croydon and how has this changed over 2020?*

*Is there a ward breakdown on this?*

*Is there a breakdown on the different types of homelessness eg couch surfers, street homeless etc?*

*What service does the Council financially contribute to in order to support those that are homeless?”*

In her response the Cabinet Member for Homes, Councillor Hay-Justice agreed that there are many forms of homelessness. She also confirmed that at the last count in November 2020 there were 15 rough sleepers, in February 2021 there were 1700 people in temporary accommodation, a rise of 200 from last year and 670 people in emergency accommodation, a rise of 70 on last year.

Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that a ward breakdown is not available but she would send on to Ria Patel the breakdown of categories data that she had.

Madam Mayor read a question from Joseph Lee to the meeting:

*“We have seen our council tax bills sky rocket. We have seen the terrible living conditions of the council tenants of Regina Court and we have seen you yet to get a grip of council finances. Considering you were a key member of the Cabinet who was instrumental in getting to where we are now, perhaps you are not the right person to be leading the Council. Will you be handing in your resignation before the next council elections in 2022?”*

In her response the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali stated that we she put herself forward for the role she knew that it would not be an easy task. However, in the five months that she had been Leader, the council had secured Government funding and had set a balanced budget. In regards to the situation of the residents in Regina Road, Councillor Ali reiterated will be her earlier statement and that she would ensure that the residents will get the Housing Service they expect.

Madam Mayor read a question from James Hillham to the meeting:

*“With the horrific scenes at Regina Court, how bright and fair does the Leader think the future of the two residents featured in the ITV News and the other residents in appalling housing looks having been ignored for months and now put into temporary accommodation?”*

In her response the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali stated that she hoped her earlier statement had provided some clarity and that as soon as she was made aware of the situation she took immediate action. Conversations had taken place with all those residents affected to ensure that the temporary accommodation was appropriate. Councillor Ali stated the she will ensure that

the council understands what went wrong to ensure that this does not happen again.

Madam Mayor read a question from Aisha Chambers to the meeting:

*“Why do you think it is feasible to give people penalty charge notices on a handful if not more roads in Croydon without informing the Borough of your plans to claw back money in a non-justifiable way?”*

In his response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that the creation of Healthy Neighbourhoods and Healthy Streets are supported by both the Croydon Council’s Local Implementation Plan and the London Mayor’s Transport Strategy. The aim is to remove through traffic from residential and to encourage active travel choices. Croydon has the potential to reduce car journeys by 400,000 to more sustainable modes such as walking, cycling and public transport.

Additionally Council Muhammad Ali stated that this is not intended to be a revenue raising exercise and that the goal is that no penalty notices are raised. Motorists should abide by the clear rules set out on the highway. All schemes are promoted via Traffic Management Orders which by law are advertised in the press and on the council’s website.

Madam Mayor read a question from Mr Howard to the meeting:

*“Following the shocking news report televised by ITV News on Monday, highlighting the appalling conditions suffered by tenants of Croydon council properties, I would like to ask the Leader the following questions at the next Council meeting.*

- 1. When did the Leader first know about the state of properties in Regina Road?*
- 2. What action did the Leader take between first hearing about the problem and the ITV News report airing on Monday evening, specifically which members of staff did she meet with and when?*
- 3. Why did the Leader of the Council believe that an externally led inquiry is necessary to find out what happened? Why is the Leader of the Council unable to find out herself what goes on in the council that she leads?*
- 4. If the Leader of the Council believes, for whatever reason that she is unable to lead the Council in understanding what happened in this situation, what justification is there for her to continue in her post?”*

In her response the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali stated she first saw the photographs used on Friday 19 March and ensured that those residents most effected were moved on the same day.

Councillor Ali also stated that she had been in multiple meetings to ensure that the residents were safe and to investigate what went wrong. These meetings have been daily and will continue to be daily. These meetings have

included the most senior officers at the council. There are a number other meetings taking place which are ensuring that the work that needs to happen is taking place.

In regards to the investigation, the Leader felt that it was important that this was carried out externally as it adds expertise and that it will help to ensure that the council takes the necessary action that it must. It is being led by the former housing lead of the former Audit Commission. It is also important that the report is produced quickly and a verbal report will be available a week on Wednesday.

Madam Mayor read a question from John Jenkins to the meeting:

*“Following the shocking news report televised by ITV News on Monday, highlighting the appalling conditions suffered by tenants of Croydon council properties, I would like to ask the Leader the following questions at the next Council meeting.*

- 1. What has been done to assess the risk in other council blocks?*
- 2. What has been done to ensure that similar complaints aren't being ignored by council officials?*
- 3. Considering the Leader's accountability should the residents expect another by-election to take place on 6 May?”*

In her response the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali stated that the council was in the process of contacting all those residents who live in similar blocks within the borough. Residents are encouraged to highlight any issues and confirmed that these are now properly logged. The investigation will look into how the repair service can meet the residents' understandable expectations.

In conclusion, the Leader stated that she acted as quickly as she could once she was made aware and that the building had now been assessed and that residents had been moved where necessary.

Madam Mayor read a question from Ria Patel to the meeting:

- “1. How many children are on free school meal vouchers and what has changed over 2020?*
- 2. Is there a ward breakdown on this?*
- 3. Does the council have any allocated funding to support children over the Easter and up-coming half-term holidays?”*

In her response the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning, Councillor Alisa Flemming stated that in the number of children in receipt of free school meal vouchers was as follows:

- January 2020 - 13298

- October 2020 - 13954
- February 2021 –15874

Unfortunately, the information is not available at ward level but Gateway had carried out a mapping exercise and I am happy to share that.

In regard to the holiday periods all local authorities were provided with funding from Government through the Winter Grant and the Holiday Activities Food Programme from the Department of Work and Pensions. This funding is ring fenced for supporting those families where children would normally receive free school meal vouchers. This funding covers holiday activities in addition to food.

## **Leader and Cabinet Member Questions**

### **Questions to the Leader**

The Leader firstly informed the meeting of the changes to Cabinet. The Administration had carried out a reform of allowances which led to reductions in Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet level appointments in recognition of the Council's financial position.

There are two changes that related to Cabinet. Councillor Shahul-Hameed is now the Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Business Recovery and Councillor Hay-Justice is now the Cabinet Member for Homes.

Also as part of the reform the number of Deputy Cabinet Members had been reduced from nine to four and these are as follows:

Councillor Patsy Cummings is the Deputy Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, Culture & Regeneration.

Councillor Nina Degradis is the new Deputy Cabinet Member for Homes & Communities and also Community Safety and Business Recovery.

Councillor Maddie Henson is the new Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning.

Councillor Stephen Mann is the new Deputy Cabinet Member for Families, Health and Social Care.

Councillor Hale thanked the Leader for her statement earlier regarding the Regina Road residents. She then queried when the Leader had been made aware of the issues and how much were the costs of repair.

In her response, the Leader reiterated what she had said earlier, that she was first made aware on Friday 19 March. With regards to the cost of repair, this was not yet available but that she will ask and send the figures through to Councillor Hale.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hale asked what assurances can you give that leaks in future will get the response they deserve.

In her response the Leader stated that the fact that these issues were revealed to her by the media was of great concern. The investigation will map what took place and how the council responded to show whether there is a bigger systematic problem.

Councillor Kabir queried what steps were being taken to ensure that this does not happen again.

In her response, the Leader stated that the independent enquiry is key to understanding what went wrong and how to ensure that the residents are provided with the service they should expect.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Kabir asked the Leader for reassurance that the findings of the investigation would be implemented.

The Leader confirmed that the findings of the investigation would be implemented without question.

Councillor Jason Cummings queried why no one from the Administration had appeared on the Vanessa programme to talk on record about the Regina Road issues.

In her response, the Leader stated that she had undertaken a number of media interviews in the last week and also attended a parliamentary select committee.

Councillor Jerry Fitzpatrick queried why the Leader wished the administration to put forward a motion to Council regarding violence against women and girls.

In her response, the Leader stated that this was an opportunity to focus on an issue that affects many people in the borough and that national concerns were highlighted following the murder of Sarah Everard. Croydon has one of the rates of domestic violence in London which has increased nationally in lockdown and it is important to have discussions in public on this issue.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Fitzpatrick asked what steps need to be taken to raise consciousness further.

In her response, the Leader stated that she agreed that this is an issue for society. Although domestic violence had been used as an example, this is regarding all forms of violence towards women. The focus has been on support for victims but much less on how to change the behaviour to stop it happening. Croydon has been working with the Mayor's office for Crime to pilot the Drive Programme which seeks to address the perpetrators.

## **Pool 1**

With the end of the time allocated for questions to the Leader, Madam Mayor moved to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool. Councillor Campbell, Councillor Lewis and Councillor Hay-Justice were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Campbell, Cabinet Member for Families, Health & Social Care informed Council that the One Croydon Alliance team received high commendation at the Health Service Journal awards ceremony on 17 March for System Leadership. This is high testament to the hard work of the team. Also April will see Councillor Campbell take over as Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board and she thanked her predecessor Councillor Louisa Woodley. The Cabinet Member also noted that 23 March marked a year of lockdown and sent a message of condolence to all those who have lost loved ones to the virus, 986 in Croydon alone. In addition she thanked the staff for rising to the challenges of increased demand.

Councillor Hay-Justice, Cabinet Member for Homes informed Council that she would like to say a very sincere apology to all the council tenants and to the people of Croydon for the shocking situation highlighted last week and confirmed that resident's concerns will be addressed.

Councillor Kabir in his question, asked how many families were in temporary accommodation and how much was it costing.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice reiterated what she had said earlier, that approximately 1700 people were in temporary accommodation and that the net cost was £4 million and the gross cost £10 million.

Councillor Kabir, in his supplementary question, asked how this was going to be reduced.

Councillor Hay-Justice stated that ideally there should be enough social housing. In the past long leases had been used but work is currently being done on an Emergency/Temporary Accommodation Strategy which should lead to a reduction in costs. The real answer was to have more social housing but that shortage is not unique to Croydon, but is countrywide.

Councillor Hale, in her question, stated that monies paid by tenants should be used for repairs. She asked how much money is currently in the accounts and was all the monies allocated last year. She believed that there had been an underspend of £3 million.

Councillor Hay-Justice stated the budget for repairs carried out by the contractor was for £11 million and she offered to meet with Councillor Hale to go through the detail of the budget and the contract.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hale asked what checks have been carried out over the years whilst she was deputy Cabinet Member.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that monitoring the complaints are included within the KPI's and once again offered to go through the details with Councillor Hale.

Councillor King stated that for the last year with complete figures, year 2019 to 2020 the budget for repairs was £11.1 million and the amount spent was £10.7 million.

Councillor Stranack, in his question, asked about the proposal for the New Addington Boxing Club to move to the leisure centre. Currently the young people are charged £3 per week but the leisure centre will be more expensive. Can you give some clarity on the situation.

In his response, Councillor Lewis, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that it was important to work with the club to find a suitable building as many are now changing to offering flexible spaces which are not suitable for a boxing club. However he believed that he had now identified a suitable building and looked forward to updating councillors in due course.

Councillor Stranack, in his supplementary question asked when the boxing club would be told of this new development.

In his response, Councillor Lewis confirmed that the boxing club was not being evicted whilst this issue was ongoing and that an offer had been made to store their equipment until a suitable long term location could be provided.

In response to Councillor Ben-Hassel, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that the standard was met some years ago and that as the end of life of the kitchens and bathrooms is reached replacements are made. As with other councils this replacement work had to stop during lockdown as they were not classed as emergencies.

Councillor Ben-Hassel, in her supplementary question, asked if the Housing Management Team had targets for the number of inspections that they carry out per year.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that the officers carry out between 700 and 900 inspections per year. She went on to explain what these inspections entail.

In his question, Councillor Neal, asked when the properties in Regina Road were last inspected and how often do inspections take place.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice confirmed that the officers have a programme of inspections and that Regina Road was not on the list of those carried out last year. However, the inspections are only carried out externally and tend to relate to the grounds maintenance, rubbish collections and other

external works and services. She also stated that she will wait until the investigation is complete before deciding on the best way forward.

Councillor Neal, in his supplementary question asked whether the situation would have arisen if tenant representatives had been part of the inspection process.

In her response, Councillor Hay-Justice stated that there was a tenants' panel members of which have spoken to councillors when they have attended inspections and highlighted issues. It was acknowledged that more could be done in sharing information with tenant's panels.

## **Pool 2**

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool, Madam Mayor signalled she was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the second pool. Councillor Flemming, Councillor Shahul-Hameed and Councillor Muhammed Ali were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery informed members that so far 7852 businesses had benefitted from the Business Support grants totally £80 million. In addition, the Night-time Businesses Grant proved very popular and she is aiming to double the amount of grant available to £1 million. In addition the voluntary sector has claimed up to £150,000 in business rates relief.

Councillor Gatland, firstly asked, whether in light of the testimony of girls regarding the amount sexual harassment that they face in schools, that the Cabinet Member for Families, Health & Social Care would be raising the issue with the leadership in schools.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that she would be taking this matter up with the council's Director of Education and with head teachers later on in the week.

In her question, Councillor Gatland raised the issue of cuts to some services which could leave some of the most vulnerable children at risk of gangs, county lines and other forms of exploitation.

In her response, Councillor Flemming reassured members that she received weekly updates particularly in respect to those families where children are at risk of exploitation outside of the home.

Councillor Gatland, in her supplementary question, raised the issue of staffing in the Children's Service team. Staff were leaving and the vacancy rate was 24% and this could be a risk to the oversight of this vulnerable group.

In her response, Councillor Flemming agreed that this was a risk but that recruitment and retention was being monitored. Some recruitment had taken

place for assessments and a recruitment process was underway to appoint a permanent Director of Children's Services.

In his question, Councillor Clark raised the issue of the size and positioning of the signs relating to the Low Traffic Neighbourhood in Broad Green particularly in Parsons Mead.

In his response, Councillor Muhammed Ali confirmed that any traffic management schemes on the highway must have signage that abides by the traffic signs regulations. This scheme has met those requirements, but some additional signage had already been put in place.

Councillor Stranack, in his question, asked how much Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 money the council holds and how much of that will be used on the voluntary sector in the coming financial year.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed confirmed that due to the issuing of the Section 114 Notice that budget for the voluntary sector had been paused but it was hoped to re-introduce it to support the voluntary sector. There had also been a rent subsidy and a bid has been made to support the subsidy for the future, which if successful will mean support from the CIL.

Councillor Stranack, in his supplementary question, asked again for the figures for CIL and Section 106 and how much would be going to voluntary organisations as he had to let them know the situation now.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed, in her response, confirmed that there was £2.2 million in the Community Fund and also reiterated the additional £150,000 in business rate support. Also agreed to have a further conversation with Councillor Stranack to supply additional information.

Councillor Mann, in his question, stated that the New Economics Foundation and the Greater London Authority (GLA) had been working on a commercial Landlords Charter which recognised the need to work differently following the pandemic and asked about whether the council would work with the New Economics Foundation to see how this could be applied in Croydon.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed acknowledged that this had been a difficult time for landlords and tenants across the borough and that some landlords had also struggled. The Council does support the Landlords Charter along with the Employers Charter where 100 businesses have already signed up, and through the Local Recovery Board.

Councillor Mann, in his supplementary question, stated that the council has a number of small and medium sized enterprise tenants such as the park cafes, and asked how will the council support them as a socially driven landlord.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed confirmed that the council is working very closely with the small and medium sized enterprises but that work also needed to be done with the voluntary sector through strengthening

the partnerships that are in place and ensuring that new funding comes to the borough.

Councillor Chatterjee, in his question asked what types of crimes had increased in the last year.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that she chaired her first Safer Croydon Partnership meeting last week but as the council is currently in the pre-election period it was not possible to publish the strategic assessment at this time. The Partnership will be renewing the Community Safety Strategy with themes around domestic abuse and protecting young people from violence and exploitation.

Councillor Chatterjee, in his supplementary question, stated that drugs offences were up 12.3%, violence against the person up 10.5%, public order offences up 8.5% and possession of weapons up 2.5% and asked whether this was due to a lack of a Community Safety Strategy or as there was one in charge of the Violence Reduction Unit.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that from July 2019 until last week there was a director in charge of the Violence Reduction Network who did a remarkable job as did the officers involved, and expressed her disappointment that Councillor Chatterjee had chosen to quote those figures at a meeting in public during the pre-election period.

Councillor Bernadette Khan, in her question asked whether the Cabinet Member for Families, Health & Social Care agreed with her, 660 schools across England and a groundswell of young people to reform the National Curriculum to reflect the achievements of black and minority ethnic people to address the harmful legacy of colonialism.

In her response, Councillor Flemming stated that work had already begun in Croydon around the decolonisation of the curriculum and that it was a timely reminder coming so close to the anniversary of the murder of George Floyd on 25 May. This work involved working with a group of head teachers with a programme called Curriculum for Change which was looking in depth at how to decolonise and included training in diversity.

At this point Councillor Flemming dropped out of the meeting and Madam Mayor agreed that Councillor Khan would ask her supplementary question once the connection was restored.

Councillor Hoar, in his question asked with the Growth Zone and Economic Development Team's funding being cut in the budget what assurance could be given to businesses, particularly in the town and district centres, that the Growth Zone and economic development would continue.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that although the economic development team had been reduced from 15 members of staff to 5 they had continued to work closely with small and medium sized businesses

to ensure their survival. The team are working with partners such as the Croydon Business network and the Covid Taskforce on the delivery of the Additional Restriction Grant. As stated earlier the council is expanding the night-time business grant and the economic development team were working hard to ensure distribution

Councillor Hoar, in his supplementary question stated that Croydon Works had been scrapped from the budget even though it provided a route into work for local people. He also mentioned the funding currently available from Government and asked how many businesses have closed in the borough.

In her response, Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated that as part of the budget pressures it had been announced that Croydon Works would be decommissioned.

With regards to the Restart Grant, the council has redeployed staff to administer this though no additional funding was available for councils to do this. Other initiatives were also taking place with the university including bringing 400 students to the borough to study, particularly around skills gaps in social care. Partnerships are key in the future in bringing funding to the borough, for example the South London Partnership was bringing in £6 million for the south London boroughs.

Councillor Audsley, in his question asked, what support will be given to the climate action movement across the borough.

In his response, Councillor Muhammed Ali stated that he was looking forward to receiving the recommendations from the Croydon Climate Commission in the next few weeks which he will then bring to Cabinet. The work will involve working with residents and delivery partners. As a council the work has already started to become a sustainable council and he will be asking everyone in Croydon to make small changes to their lifestyle in 2021.

### **Pool 3**

With the end of time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the second pool, Madam Mayor signalled she was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool. Councillor King and Councillor Young were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Young had no announcements but clarified the figures that we discussed earlier. The Council's annual repair budget in £11.9 million and the Axis? budget was £10.9 million. Axis budget had been overspent every year since year 2015 to 2016. He offered to attend the meeting between Councillor Hale and Councillor Hay-Justice.

Councillor Hale apologised for her error and that the current underspend was £300,000.

Councillor Jason Cummings in his question asked about the Leader's apparent refusal to appoint a member of the minority group to the post of Chair of the General purposes and Audit Committee, given that the recommendation had come from the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and what discussions had taken place with them about not implementing that recommendation as they intended it.

In his response, Councillor King stated that the recommendation from the non-statutory rapid review was very clear in that the council should consider that the Committee is not chaired by a majority party councillor. It was quite an established principle across local government that where the chairing is not undertaken by a member of the majority group then there are two models to be followed. Either it would be chaired by a councillor from another party or chaired by someone independent, bringing professional expertise. Therefore, the review did not state that it should automatically be chaired by someone from the minority party.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Cummings asked again about what discussions had taken place with MHCLG about this in terms of how it will be implemented.

In his response, Councillor King stated that he had not had any discussion with MHCLG regarding implementation of the recommendation but that the Committee will no longer be chaired by a member of the majority group and that is what will be proposed for the council AGM.

Councillor Jewitt, in her question asked Councillor Young to share his reflections on the Renewing Croydon Conference.

Councillor Young, in his response stated that in a report to full council on 30 November 2020 it was acknowledged that the council will not fundamentally improve without staff being fully engaged and listened to. The Renewing Croydon Conference was a first step in staff engagement in the plan's delivery. In his view the conference was highly successful by creating a shared understanding of both the council's proposals and the engagement plan that underpins it. It was also successful in sharing longer term ambitions to be achieved over three years to in bed new ways of working including cultural and behavioural change. He also thanked the staff for their commitment, Grace Addy for chairing the conference and to the Interim CEO for making the event a success.

Councillor Millson, in his question stated that the last meeting of the General Purposes and Audit Committee (GPAC) heard from the Internal Audit team who outlined their plan for 2021 to 2022. He asked whether it would be possible to add to the plan regarding attempts by the public to contact the council and how those were dealt with. There was general agreement at GPAC but in light of the Leader's comments earlier could the audit team be asked to add this issue to their priority list.

Councillor Young, in his response agreed to take the issue away and speak with the internal audit team. With regards to governance improvements the council want to draw in more information digitally using Power BI which will give greater overview for councillors.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Millson supported the use of Power BI as a way for non-executive councillors to receive information. However, given the cross chamber support at GPAC and with members being contacted by members of the public who had failed to get an answer from the council, did Councillor Young share the Leader's surprise and that the council could not have responded to concerns.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that what had been revealed in the last week was shocking and an investigation is underway. He will not pre-empt the inquiry but once the results are published then he would be happy to comment.

Madam Mayor agreed to allow Councillor Jewitt as Chair of GPAC to speak and she stated that she is in discussion with officers in the internal audit team to bring that matter forward.

Councillor Canning, in his question asked what income Croydon Council was currently receiving from the Colonnade Centre and how does it compare to the council's outgoings to cover the borrowing costs incurred to buy the Colonnade's freehold.

In his response, Councillor King stated that in the last year for which full figures are available over £2 million in revenue was generated which resulted in nearly £1 million of net contribution to the council's general fund budget. The centre has seen a fall in income this year to £1.5million to £1.6 million but it continues to generate funds for the council general fund budget.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Canning asked in light of the fact that the centre is very popular with residents and is mainly leisure rather than retail, whether Councillor King agreed that criticism of this particular investment was wide of the mark.

In his response, Councillor King agreed that it is a popular and that many people were looking forward to attractions reopening. Also where investments have been made to support the council, such as Vulcan Way and Imperial Way they have been generally successful in the contributions made to the council's general fund. It has been important that the council explored all the ways available to ensure that it can generate the income needed to fund the budget and live within its means. One way is by maximising the income and these investments have done that.

Councillor Hoar, in his question asked whether any discussions had been had with the Justice Department with regards to using the empty Croydon Park Hotel as an Nightingale Court as it would appear that the Jurys Inn was being used.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that he was not aware of any discussion having taken place.

In his supplementary, Councillor Hoar stated that this appeared to be a wasted opportunity in maximising the income and requested that Councillor Young made enquiries as to whether this option had been looked at.

In his response, Councillor Young stated that the council had just started a mini competition for property agency companies who are experts in their field undertake a valuation and engage the market and for them to provide advice to Cabinet so that a collective decision can be made. Work is underway and the urgency acknowledged to make sure that council balances the budget.

In her question, Councillor Ben-Hassel asked the Cabinet Member to set out how the budget passed earlier this month responds to the Report in the Public Interest.

In his response, Councillor King stated that there were a number of points raised in the Report in the Public Interest that were specially made with the councils budget setting process in mind. There are a number of ways to resolve these. The underlying causes of the overspend in Adults and Children have been identified and are being addressed in the budget. There has been much greater rigor in the budget setting process this year with input from scrutiny committees and opposition members. The Treasury Management Strategy was also part of the budget papers and was fully reviewed and refreshed. Considerable officer time was devoted to challenges brought about by Brick by Brick and there was a request to look at the Revolving Investment Fund which had been addressed by the council with acceptance that no new investment will be made across the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) via the RIF.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Ben-Hassel asked how is the council going to monitor unintended consequences of budget reductions to avoid possible cost escalation in some departments which could be caused by budget reductions in other departments.

In his response, Councillor King stated that it was a really important point and that it is down to everyone to monitor the budget's deliverability and any challenges and problems are highlighted. Considerable due diligence went into the budget setting process including external challenge. The Section 151 officer had already begun the process of monitoring the budget savings and budget reports will be going to Cabinet on a monthly basis.

In his question, Councillor Ward asked for the Cabinet Member's view on transparency of information.

In his response, Councillor King agreed that transparency is good practice.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Ward mentioned that he had to Freedom of Information requests which were two weeks overdue, one of which had been requested some time before as a member of scrutiny and he requested whether the response could be received by the end of the week.

In his response, Councillor King stated that it was not aware of this particular case and there was a process to go through if anyone is unhappy with either the response or the time taken to receive a reply. If Councillor Ward would send through the details then he would take the matter up on his behalf.

Councillor Audsley, in his question asked how the Cabinet Member would be using his role to lead change in the council's contracts and procurement tendering process.

In his response, Councillor Young confirmed that with the level of spend involved that this area was a priority. Almost 200 contracts are due for renewal in the coming year and that is an opportunity to secure best value by going back to the market or creating new markets. It is also important to have good project management and a new reporting process proposal will be brought to the Cabinet in May.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Audsley asked whether the housing repair contract in relation to Regina Road had been reviewed.

In his response, Councillor Young confirmed that the housing repair contract covered all of Croydon Council's housing estate. An extension to the contract was agreed in January following a report that went to Cabinet which showed that the contractor had performed above the average benchmark. As part of his role and the ongoing investigation it will be important to know how the benchmarking was carried out so that decisions can be made in the future. Having seen what had happened made him worried.

With an end to the time allocated to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool, Madam Mayor brought Croydon Question Time to a close.

## 25/21 **Member Petitions**

The following petition was presented by Councillor Fitzsimons of behalf of residents:

- a) *"We the undersigned, do hereby petition Croydon Council to place permits on Dominion Road, CR0 6JP. Due to some of the surrounding streets being permitted last year which has since caused a great addition of other cars parking on Dominion Road by non-residents."*

In his response, Councillor Muhammed Ali gave some background to the scheme and explained the process for extending Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ's) including the length of time it takes to implement new schemes. He will supply full details in writing.

Councillor Jewitt stated that she would be bringing a petition to the next meeting of Council.

## 26/21 **Council Debate Motions**

The Mayor read out the first Council Debate Motion on behalf of the Administration:

“This Council mourns the death of Sarah Everard along with 116 including black and minority ethnic women who were killed as a result of male violence in the last twelve months alone prior to 11 March 2020. This Council believes that this pernicious prevalence of violence against women and girls is an epidemic in its own right where 80% of women of all ages have been sexually harassed in public. 97% of young women have been sexually harassed. 1 in 2 women have been sexually harassed in the workplace and 1 in 3 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. 1 in 5 women will be raped in their lifetime. 2 women a week are killed by a current or former partner and 3 women take their own lives following domestic abuse.

Reported cases of domestic abuse have risen significantly nationally in lockdown. Calls to national domestic helplines almost doubled. Croydon has one of the highest rates of domestic violence in London and during lockdown saw further increases in reported cases of domestic violence and calls for support to our domestic violence services. This rise in domestic violence, particularly high risk cases, is now recorded on our corporate risk register. We pay tribute to the council’s staff who are part of the FJC who have worked so hard to provide critical support and advice to those experiencing domestic violence and to partners and those voluntary sector partners for everything they do to keep women and their children safe and bring perpetrators to account.

This Council believes that harassment faced by all women, from all backgrounds and diversity is unacceptable. We must create an environment women are safe in both public and private spaces. This Council resolves to:

Set out in the VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) Strategy how we will tackle forms of violence against women including street harassment, domestic violence, sexual violence, online violence against women, FGM. So called honour based violence and hate crimes against women.

Ensure that Croydon’s multi agency Community Safety Strategy continues to prioritise tackling all forms of violence against women and girls and ensure that the work we pursue with our partners engages men in the response, not just support and protection for women.”

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Patsy Cummings to propose the motion.

Councillor Cummings stated that the motion quoted the shocking statistics but went on to highlight the additional disadvantage that black, brown and refugee women face with the additional systemic racism. The BAME Domestic Abuse Partnership Forum stated a petition last week and hundreds of women had added their names. To highlight this issue Councillor Cummings read a statement from them which raised the cases of Blessing Olusegun, Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman to illustrate the issue. The amendment to the Domestic Violence Bill going through the House of Lords calls for non-discrimination to ensure that all women and girls receive the same treatment. There is a lack of data and statistics specifically around black, brown and migrant women and these must be properly investigated and recorded.

Councillor Skipper seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Redfern stated violence against women and girls is nothing new but that the openness with which it was now being discussed is. She welcomed the aims of the motion and of using the Community Safety Strategy to tackle such violence. She additionally explained that the Domestic Abuse Bill will provide additional funding through the GLA to support the cost of new services required by the Bill. Education of men in this subject was key and the council needs to change its own culture and show deeds not words.

Councillor Redfern supported the motion.

Councillor Ovir stated that she identified with Sarah Everard, and shared some of her personal experiences. She asked that the word epidemic be retracted as this should be seen as a global pandemic that has not suddenly appeared and is not confirmed to Croydon. It should be recognised that 95% of incidents are never reported. The motion shows that those who do report will be treated with compassion.

Councillor Ovir supported the motion.

Councillor Skipper shared her personal experiences of domestic violence and how the incidents were dealt with by people who should have been able to provide support. This week the news covered the story of private schools which chose to cover up incidents of sexual assault and put reputation over reporting the problem. She also stated that one amount of street lighting or other measures that women and girls can take would have protected her from the abuse that took place in her home. Women have been trying to protect themselves for generations, what is needed is for men to stop attacking women and for society to support women who do come forward to report.

Madam Mayor thanked Councillor Skipper for her openness and honesty and assured her that everyone on the call tonight would support her in any way if required.

Before the vote was taken the Madam Mayor confirmed that there were 38 Labour members and 25 Conservative members present on the call.

The motion was put to the vote and was unanimously carried.

The Mayor read out the second Council Debate Motion on behalf of the Opposition:

“The negligence of Croydon Council has caused families in council housing to be subject to unacceptable and dehumanising living conditions. It is unacceptable that in the 21st Century in Britain families should be forced to live amongst thick layers of mould and severe damp. The council must take responsibility for the fact that soaking wet floors and un-useable kitchens put people’s lives at risk. The council acknowledges that residents have been raising these issues for many months and complaints have either been woefully mismanaged or wilfully ignored. The council acknowledges that by claiming ignorance of these diabolical conditions, they cannot say with any confidence how many other residents across the borough may be suffering similar circumstances. The council agrees that such a systemic failure to manage the council’s housing stock is entirely its fault and wholeheartedly apologise to all those families affected.”

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Hale to propose the motion.

Councillor Hale stated that if it had not been for the issue being shown on ITV News this matter would not have come to light. Residents had been complaining for eighteen months and this was a terrible failure of the part of this council. Twenty times residents complained and the Cabinet Member at the time was also the ward councillor. Once identified the problem was quickly solved but being completely ignored must have been a very distressing time for those residents. This followed on from the financial issues and the Government bailout but even when money is not the issue, this shows the systemic failure of this council.

Councillor Streeter seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Fraser stated that as the local ward councillor he was shocked, saddened and angry when he visited Regina Road last week. There are more than 13000 flats and houses in the borough which provide social housing, most of which was of good quality but did acknowledge that some was not. It was clear that there is a problem with housing management and council contractors visited the blocks but failed to resolve the issues and that this was a corporate failure in many different areas. The investigation currently underway will highlight where it went wrong and what actions are required to ensure that this does not happen again.

Councillor Hay-Justice stated that seeing the ITV News item showing the conditions that Croydon tenants faced filled her with horror. The tenants certainly felt that they had no-one to turn to and as a council responsibility must be acted upon. The initial priority was to re-house those tenants most affected and they were moved immediately and others were subsequently moved. It could not have been foreseen that this type of issue would arise but the council must learn lessons and find out what went wrong. The

independent investigation will give tenants a voice as part of its work but we need to wait until that investigation is completed before making judgments on any of our staff. This has caused shame to our town but this will be turned around.

Last week all councillors, in their role as tenant advocates, were called upon to raise tenants concerns through a dedicated email address and thank you to the twenty five responses that were received. However, I cannot support this motion until the work of the independent investigation is completed.

Councillor Streeter stated that although the councillors have their differences on this occasion we were all united in our horror at the images on ITV News last week. He felt that in her statement earlier that the Leader has understood the severity of the situation and that there was genuine remorse and a genuine sense that this should be put right. Context from Councillor Fraser, although helpful cannot be a reason to shirk responsibility and talking about what happened in the 1990's does not detract from the fact that this happened in 2021. Opposition councillors have been trying to get issues resolved on behalf of tenants and any support from the Cabinet Member was most welcome to clear the backlog of cases.

It appeared that this issue uncovered a cultural problem within the council which too easily blamed systems and structures rather than looking into the decisions of individuals. We need to face up to these issues and focus on what happened locally. I cannot say with any certainty that this administration listens to the residents.

The motion was put to the vote and was defeated.

## 27/21 **Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision**

### **i) Revocation of Section 114 Notice**

The Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali, stated that the Section 114 Notice had now lapsed. This was due to granting of Capitalisation Directions for 2020/1 and 2021/2. This was a very positive position for our residents and also for the staff who had worked so hard. It was also a very good start to what would be a very important financial year in consolidating the council's resilience financially having secured that important financial assistance. Whilst the Section 114 Notice had lapsed some of the conditions will remain including the Spending Control Panel to maintain the important discipline from the very start of the coming year.

Both capitalisation directions are conditional and should the Council fail to meet the conditions then the Government may choose to withdraw the direction. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the Council meets the conditions set out in terms of the conditions in the letters in regards to savings or containing spending within the Council's budget is non-negotiable. Should

this occur then the Section 151 officer would almost certainly need to issue a new section 114 notice.

Councillor King seconded the recommendation.

The recommendation was put to the vote and was unanimously carried.

## 28/21 **Vote of Thanks**

The Mayor passed the Chair to the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury, who presided over the vote of thanks to the outgoing Mayor of Croydon.

The Deputy Mayor invited the Mayor to give her farewell address.

The Mayor commenced her address by congratulating Councillor Chowdhury on taking up his role of Mayor and expressed her personal thanks for the support that she had received from him over the last nine months. She was sure that he would shine in the role of Mayor.

The Mayor thanked everyone for giving her the chance to fulfil the role. Being the mayor of Croydon and being the youngest ever women to do so had been the honour of her life. For all mayors their year is always extraordinary. Each and every one brings some amazing contributions to the role, but they have not experienced the year that we have this year. So felt that it is important to reflect that.

The Mayor recounted how she was the first “virtual” mayor who was sworn in over Teams and how she took on the role knowing that it would be a difficult year. However, once lockdown began to ease in July the first mayoral event took place, The Mayor’s Reading Roadshow. People were able to come together in their “bubbles” for a picnic and to listen to Croydon’s amazing authors. Over 300 people attended.

September saw the anniversary of Operation Market Garden which had forever tied Croydon to its twin town of Arnhem. Although not able to attend in person, the first mayor for many years unable to do so, Croydon was able to hold its own small event. The Mayor personally thanked Seth, Councillor Toni Letts and Croydon’s Deputy Lieutenant, Ray Wilkinson for making it happen. Of particular note was the fact that it was possible to replicate the most moving part.

In December, the Mayor was able to work with Father Christmas to deliver present to Croydon’s children.

Particular thanks were given to members of her team, Stephanie Cope, Hema Vasanthakumar, Nick Evans and Luca Bercelli especially in the way that the mayor’s office adapted to a whole new way of working. With the help of Councillor Janet Campbell it was possible to host a live Facebook event with

a panel of speakers who talked about their experience of death and dying to combat the stigma of talking about it. This was done with the help of one of the Mayor's charities St Christopher's Hospice. A further one will be taking place next month and the theme of people's experiences of "coming out".

Also highlighted Croydon Connected. With the help of Shelley Davies all Croydon schools were invited to take part in producing a giant paper chain recording their experiences of the past year. This has been presented to Croydon Museum.

At the start of her term of office the Mayor had outlined her theme of early life and the reason behind that choice. Videos were showcased especially for the day and thanks went out to everyone involved in producing those and to all those who took part.

The final event of the year will be the Baby and Toddler Festival which will be free for everyone to attend.

In her closing remarks, the Mayor paid personal thanks to group whips, who have all worked very hard to ensure the smooth running of the council meetings. Paid tribute to the Democratic Services Team particularly to Stephen Rowan who was a mentor and friend throughout the entire time.

Secondly to her amazing three charities, St Christopher's Hospice, The Motor Neurone Disease Association and Homestart Croydon and to the valuable work that they all do.

The final thanks went to her family, her parents, her sister and brother-in-law, her children Theo and Liam and to her husband Mark. Also paid tribute to the extraordinary heroism shown by the people of Croydon including essential workers and volunteers, and the support given throughout the pandemic and that they continue to rise to all the challenges presented. She was proud to have taken the council through these very challenging times.

The Deputy Mayor thanked the Mayor for her address and invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali to move the vote of thanks to the Mayor. In doing so she acknowledged that the year had been particularly challenging and that the usual role of the Mayor was not possible due to Covid. She reiterated Madam Mayor's thanks to the essential workers including council staff who have been integral to supporting the community. Particularly highlighted was the Mayor's success at adapting to the circumstances by holding so many events remotely to keep the connection with the community.

Also the Mayor raised some important issues throughout the year such as early years, death and dying and LGBTQ+ rights and achieved success in promoting and raising money for her chosen charities. It was also important to note the success that Madam Mayor had in chairing the virtual meetings and acknowledged that there were more meetings than would normally be expected in a municipal year.

The Leader concluded by inviting Members of Council to pay tribute to the Mayor, Councillor Henson.

The Deputy Mayor invited the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Hale, to second the motion. Councillor Hale acknowledged that this had been a difficult year and that she was sure that it had not been the year that the Mayor was hoping for. In spite of all of the challenges, including recovering from Covid the list of online events was impressive and the Mayor was a passionate advocate for Croydon and for the excellent charities. Whilst the usual civic events could not take place the Mayor made up for that in the virtual world to support and connect with the people of Croydon.

The Deputy Mayor put the motion to the vote with the vote of thanks, which was passed unanimously in the following terms:

1. Members of Council tender their grateful thanks to The Worshipful, The Mayor, Councillor Maddie Henson, for the courteous and efficient manner in which she presided over the Council's deliberations during the past year;
2. Member of the Council record their sincere appreciation of the dignified manner in which Councillor Maddie Henson has carried out the traditional duties of the office of Mayor, of the support and encouragement which she and her Consort, Mr Mark Hanson, have given to local organisations and of the prominent part they have taken in the social life of the Borough during the Mayor's period of office;  
and
3. That this resolution be sealed and presented to the Mayor at the Annual Council Meeting in a suitable form.

29/21 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.58 pm

**Signed:**

**Date:**

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