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Council

Meeting held on Wednesday, 8 March 2023 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

MINUTES

- Present:** Councillor Alisa Flemming (Chair);
Councillor Sue Bennett (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Kola Agboola, Jade Appleton, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Adele Benson, Margaret Bird, Claire Bonham, Mike Bonello, Simon Brew, Janet Campbell, Louis Carserides, Richard Chatterjee, Chris Clark, Sherwan Chowdhury, Stuart Collins, Mario Creatura, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Nina Degrad, Danielle Denton, Samir Dwesar, Lara Fish, Sean Fitzsimons, Clive Fraser, Amy Foster, Simon Fox, Gayle Gander, Maria Gatland, Brigitte Graham, Matt Griffiths, Lynne Hale, Patricia Hay-Justice, Maddie Henson, Christopher Herman, Yvette Hopley, Mohammed Islam, Karen Jewitt, Mark Johnson, 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, Jason Perry, Ellily Ponnuthurai, Holly Ramsey, Helen Redfern, Chrishni Reshekaron, Scott Roche, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Nikhil Sherine Thampi, Luke Shortland, Appu Srinivasan, Andy Stranack, Stewart, Esther Sutton, Catherine Wilson, Robert Ward and Callton Young
- Apologies:** Councillor Rowenna Davis

PART A

34/21 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

35/21 **Urgent Business (If any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

36/21 **Announcements**

Executive Mayor, Jason Perry, wished all a Happy International Women's Day, and congratulated Councillor Rowenna Davis on the recent birth of her baby. The Chair echoed the well wishes of the Mayor and entire Council.

37/21 **Council Tax and Budget 2023-24**

It was agreed that the order of the meeting would include fifteen minutes of questions to the Executive Mayor followed by fifteen minutes of questions to the Cabinet Member for Finance.

In the first round of questioning the Mayor responded that:

- The proposed increase in Council Tax was not to make savings for the future but to cut expenses as part of a package of cost-cutting measures, which would make income available to the council for future years;
- Alternative budget proposals had not come forward from the Labour group;
- The Mayor was keen for members to approach the Executive to make recommendations about how the Hardship Fund should be accessed to ensure those with differing accessibility requirements and the digitally excluded would be able to access support;
- The council would ensure that core services and functions were provided and that the Executive was ensuring the budget provided improvement to those services;
- There were around forty different projects planned for the Transformation Programme for which £10m was allocated, all with differing phases and impacts; and,
- Scrutiny had assessed that the budget was prudent, safe and deliverable;

During the fifteen minutes of questions to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Jason Cummings responded that:

- £200m worth of capital receipts were included in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);
- The council did not owe any money to Central Government for covid-related costs;
- There were various pots of money which could be used at the discretion of the council to provide support to residents who were classed as having 'no recourse to public funds', who were noted as four times more likely to fall behind on bills with Council Tax being the most common bill of this nature;

Council then debated the amendment put forward by the Green group. Councillor Ria Patel, speaking on behalf of the amendment, explained that the improvements contained in the proposed £1m allocation of money to improving active travel infrastructure in the borough was needed to make the

borough safer and more accessible, and satisfied the Mayor's need to include environmental improvements in the budget.

Councillor Esther Sutton seconded the motion and reserved her right of reply.

Councillor Chris Clark explained that the issue of active travel had been addressed in the Mayor's Business Plan, and that he support the amendment enthusiastically.

Councillor Jason Cummings explained that, even if the Conservative group voted in favour of the amendment the Green group had made it clear that they did not support the Executive's budget proposals, and so they could not support the amendment, even though they were happy to work collaboratively on these issues going forwards.

Councillor Esther Sutton expressed that they welcomed the support from the Labour group but that it was a shame the Executive would not support the proposals.

Council then voted on the amendment and:

RESOLVED, with 35 votes in favour and 34 votes against and one abstention, not to amend the budget proposals in accordance with that put forward by the Green group.

Council then debated the substantive motion, which was the Executive Mayor's original budget proposal. Members argued that:

- There were no possible alternatives to this budget;
- The rise in Council Tax would deepen existing inequalities that existed especially in Croydon;
- The £2m Hardship Fund would be in place to support the most vulnerable;
- It would be fairer to allow the residents of Croydon to vote on the increase in a referendum;
- The tens of thousands of residents who signed the petition against the increase were being ignored;
- Not passing this budget would bring the entire council to a halt, and that was not in the best interests of residents; and,
- If this budget was not passed members would need to take upon themselves the personal liability that the repercussions would entail.

Council then voted and:

RESOLVED, with 34 votes for and 36 votes against, to reject the budget proposals put forward by the Executive Mayor.

The Chief Finance Officer then outlined the requirement for members to pass a budget, and the Chair **MOVED** that members withdraw from the meeting to hold discussions in private for up to forty minutes This was **SECONDED** by Councillor Mario Creatura and **RESOLVED** to adjourn the meeting for up to forty minutes.

Members withdrew from the Chamber at 8.50 pm and returned at 9.36 pm.

Mayor Jason Perry **MOVED** the budget proposals as contained in the report. This was **SECONDED** by Councillor Jason Cummings.

Councillor Stuart King, Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Labour group stated that the party did not believe that the Executive had properly followed the process for increasing Council Tax by this amount, but that they understood the significance of the impact of not setting a budget, and so the members had no choice other than to abstain from the vote.

Councillor Ria Patel, speaking on behalf of the Green group, stated that they had been given no alternatives, and that they had no choice other than to vote against this budget.

Councillor Claire Bonham, Liberal Democrat member, stated she too would not be voting for this budget.

The Chair put the recommendations to the vote and Council:

RESOLVED, with 34 votes for, 3 against, and 33 abstentions to:

- 2.1 To agree an increase in the Croydon element of the 2023/24 council tax charge by 12.99% (Band D £203.95)
- 2.2 To agree a 2% increase (Band D £31.40) in the 2023/24 Adult Social Care precept levy.
- 2.3 To agree the calculation of the council tax requirement of £247.759m and council tax as set out in Appendix B (to the addendum to the Council Report of 1 March 2023 – Appendix B update) and note that the inclusion of the Greater London Authority precept will result in a total increase of 13.93% (Band D £273.90) in the overall Croydon council tax bill.

- 2.4 To approve the setting of the Council's own total net expenditure budget for 2023/24 at £340.911m (Appendix C – to the Council Report, 1st March 2023).
- 2.5 To agree the detailed programme of revenue savings, income, demand pressures and legacy budget corrections, by directorate, as recommended by Cabinet of 22 February 2023 (Appendix D – to the Council Report, 1st March 2023).
- 2.6 To agree a £10m budget in 2023/24 to support the transformation programme.
- 2.7 To agree that the Corporate Director of Resources be authorised to collect and recover National Non-Domestic Rate and council tax in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (as amended), the Local Government Finance Act 1992.
- 2.8 To agree the Council's 2023/24 to 2026/27 General Fund Capital Programme which includes planned expenditure of £305.67m (including capitalisation directions) across the four years as recommended by Cabinet on 22 February.
- 2.9 To agree the Council 2023/24 Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme with a total investment planned of £32.62m with borrowing of nil as recommended by Cabinet on 22 February.
- 2.10 To agree the Council's Capital Strategy, drafted with the support of PwC, as detailed within Appendix A of the Capital Programme and Capital Strategy 2022/23 to 2026/27 Report to Cabinet on 22 February 2023.
- 2.11 To agree The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023/24 as set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24 Report to Cabinet on 22 February
- 2.12 The Prudential Indicators as set out in the Treasury Management Strategy Statement, Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy 2023/24 Report to Cabinet on 22 February.
- 2.13 The Annual Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement (required by the Local Authorities (Capital Financing and Accounting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008SI 2008/414) as set out in Appendix B

of the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and Annual
Investment Strategy 2023/24 Report to Cabinet on 22 February.

The meeting ended at 9.52 pm

Signed:

Date:

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