**SUMMARY MINUTES OF THE THCAT ELECTED MAYORAL HUSTINGS MEETING HELD AT ST. PAUL’S CHURCH HALL, THORNTON HEATH**

**ON TUESDAY 22ND MARCH 2022 FROM 7PM**

1. **Welcome, apologies, health and safety briefing.**

**Gill** from St. Paul’s gave the Health & Safety meeting.

Apologies: Jackie Cross, Jerry Meldrum, Linda Watson.

**Andrea** introduced herself as Chair of THCAT and welcomed the audience to this opportunity to hear from the elected mayoral candidates for Croydon. In October last year Croydon voted in a referendum to have an elected Mayor for Croydon. She then introduced the candidates:

* Val Shawcross (Labour)
* Farah London (Taking the Initiative Party)
* Jason Perry (Conservative)
* Gavin Palmer (Independent)
* Rick Howard (Liberal Democrat)
* Peter Underwood (Green)

**2. Introductions from Croydon’s six Directly Elected Mayor candidates (maximum of 5 minutes each)**

Andrea then invited the candidates to speak for up to 5 minutes each to introduce themselves and tell us their policies for Croydon, especially the north of the borough.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): Studied mechanical engineering at Exeter where he was in many sports teams. He is nearly 50, an industry director whose family has lived in Croydon for 120 years. His Grandfather was from Norbury. He believes having an Independent Mayor is the only was to fix the 2 party system at Croydon Council.

**Farah London** (TIP): Is from S. Norwood and was born here. The 2 party system in Croydon is not working and needs to change. She will listen to the people and not dictate to them. She wants to bring change so that Croydon will be in the top 10 places to live in the UK and not the worst 20.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): Has lived in Croydon for 8 years and has a background in the finance industry with a previous army career in Iraq and Afghanistan where he held the rank of major. He currently owns his own business which helps charities etc achieve their goals. Croydon needs to get a grip on what has been happening. There is a long legacy of one side attacking the other with no attempt to do the best for Croydon. He would hand back power to local communities and let people have a real say. Funding would go to local communities to spend as they need and empower them to do the best for their own areas.

**Jason Perry** (Con): Was born and bred in Croydon, living in Upper Norbury. He spent a lot of time as a child in Thornton Heath Library and learned to swim in Thornton Heath pool and is a proud, stated educated Croydonian. The stakes are high in Croydon. Council borrowing has doubled and been spent on hotels, shopping centres and unlawful activities. The times are changing and we need change. He can bring the skills of a local businessman. As mayor he will:

* Fix finances and stop borrowing
* Reduce crime
* Stop exclusion in order to stop gangs
* Work on housing with a tenants’ charter to fix the current situation where repairs etc. do not happen.
* Restore the town centre to bring in money and investment.

Croydon made me and I want to give back and make it a place where my family will want to stay and be proud. Croydon is better in partnership. It should be on the map for the right reasons as a good place to live, stay and play.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): apologised for being late due to public transport issues. He wants to bring a Croydon Council that works for you. It hasn’t worked for anyone for 20 years. His background is in the Civil Service and he will look at the management side of the Council. We need to change the way we do politics to put the power back in the people’s hands. He will work with the Croydon Climate Crisis Commission and his aim is to make Croydon happy. Spending, organisations etc should be about making lives better. He will go through everything the council does to improve systems. The council will work with communities to make life better.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): I believe in Croydon and the elected Mayor will have huge power. Originally from the North, she has lived in Croydon for 37 years. She has been Development Secretary, working overseas. In 1994 she was Leader of Croydon Council where she did some cross-party work and is proud of what was achieved on the expansion programme, failing schools and the tram link. She moved to City Hall in 2000 where she was Chair of the London Fire Brigade for the Mayor of London working on anti-terror strategy and reducing fire deaths by half. On the Transport Committee, she was Deputy Mayor for Transport and has been on the TFL Board since she retired. She was Chair of the Crystal Palace Park Trust.

She is coming out of retirement because Croydon is struggling and wants to bring her experience to fix Croydon. There are huge challenges: the town centre, flytipping, knife and gang crime, poor customer services. It needs not just money but respect and we can pull it round. We must be able to give tenants the best service – currently they are not. They need to be able to speak to someone who cares and is concerned. She has enormous experience and can make Croydon Council work with and for you.

**3. Written questions submitted in advance to THCAT for the candidates**

**Andrea** combined questions submitted by Linda Watson and Jerry Meldrum:

Q: The needs of the north and the south of Croydon are often quite different. How would you prioritise meeting these needs? Would density of population play a part? What are the candidates' plans to ensure the north of the borough (i.e. Thornton Heath) gets the same level of investment that the south of the borough does?

**Jason Perry** (Con): One size does not fit all. Communities come into play (residents’ associations, churches etc) and we will work with residents from the bottom up. Neither the North nor the South will be ignored by the Council. All will be listened to. The answers lie within communities to make a brighter future.

**Farah London** (TIP): Community is at the heart and the North has been badly neglected. The streets at filthy but this is not just down to Veolia as they have the contract in Westminster and it is perfectly clean. It is down to bad leadership. The North needs investment with the community and needs to be listened to. The Council doesn’t answer if you call it. Money needs to go to the elderly, the youth and the community. The lack of investment has led to knife crime and gangs. Dexter has opened his Bakers shop to the young a they have nowhere to go. We also need to address education.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): The North/South narrative has gone wrong. The Mayor is responsible for the whole of Croydon. An 8 year old in Coulsdon or Thornton Heath have the same needs as do 85 year olds. She rejects the us versus them in favour of one borough, one community doing the best for everyone.

Croydon is out of the mainstream of London with sloppy contract management. They are not doing regeneration as others are. Levelling up money was not applied for and they are not using the major regeneration money available. They need to catch up with the new ways of doing things. The Council can work with communities to access funding which is not available to the local Council. They need to be innovative to generate extra resources with business improvement districts etc. We should be one Croydon together and care as much for Thornton Heath and Crystal Palace as Coulsdon. In Thornton Heath 25% of the population move around every year.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): How have we got here? Car parking prices went up in 1995 generating income but then 3 thousand spaces were sold off the town centre was left to suffer. We have 2 dysfunctional parties. He would go back to selecting the best on merit to do the best for Croydon. His grandfather built terraces of houses in North Croydon. We had 1,000 high value people working in the Nestlé building, equal to 5,000 residents but they were hounded out. The Council prostituted itself to Westfield and sacrificed the town centre to Westfield.

Val would make a good Deputy Mayor.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): Currently Labour do not think they can lose in the North and the Tories don’t think they can lose in the South. One size does not fit all in Croydon and we need to understand the differences and work with the communities. Let local areas decide where the money should be spent. Croydon is diverse and we should celebrate that.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): We need to break away from North and South. There are people who are struggling in the South and in the North so we don’t have a divide. However, there is no blanket one size fits all. We will work for individuals and what they need. It is difficult for Croydon currently to put forward a case for more money because of how badly they have handled it.

**4. Audience questions for the candidates**

**Andrea** asked that both questions and answers should be kept brief and to the point to fit as many as possible into the limited time.

Q1: Flytipping: If you step out to the corner of Norfolk Road you will see a flytip. Croydon is one of the most flytipped areas in the UK and it mostly comes from residents. What will you do to change the flytipping culture?

**Farah London** (TIP): If people need to dispose of things, we need to provide a good collection service.

**Jason Perry** (Con): During the pandemic in Croydon, getting rid of rubbish was not easy. We need to make it easier for people to get rid of rubbish and the Council needs to change its culture to make it easier. We will adopt a zero tolerance policy.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): Flytipping is a national problem but it is particularly bad here. THCAT go out a lot to report flytips and hotspots. There are persistent flytippers and rogue landlords and we need more enforcement. We will bring in covert teams to catch these. We will experiment in ways to make getting rid of rubbish easier. Current Council strategies do not support each other eg. There is an intention to reduce car use but people often have to drive a long way to the tip. Prices for business waste should be reduced. In the Blair years there was a focus on prevention but now we are chasing our tail.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): I currently have 3 cubic metres of flytipping to get rid of and 50 car tyres. There are 72 tons of flytipped waste on land bought by my family in the 1930’s. It is out of control. Garden waste is not regularly collected. In problem areas there should be skip days to get rid of large bulky waste. Currently the Council does not allow small traders or residents with small vans to get rid of waste at the tip which needs to change.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): First of all the Council’s waste contracts need to be sorted out. Businesses should be encouraged to reduce the waste they produce. We need to make it easier to dispose of waste, particularly large objects and we will work with the community to change attitudes. If an area appears well looked after, people take more care. It needs a big effort from the Council to show that it I looked after.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): We need to make it easier to do the right thing. If you have no car, you cannot use the tip. There needs to be safe access for pedestrians. We should also cooperate with other boroughs so that residents can take their waste to the nearest tip even if that is not in Croydon. We need to look after the community better and take action to tackle flytipping.

Q2. Investment and Regeneration: What plans do you have to increase investment in Croydon and specifically in Thornton Heath. How will you regenerate our High Streets and attract inward investment.

**Farah London** (TIP): Labour wants to tax everybody to raise money but we need to bring in investment. Some suggestions are@

* To make Croydon the Tech City of the UK bringing in Apple, Microsoft etc.
* Create a Convention Centre for international trade conferences etc.
* Create jobs by bringing in business, encouraging community start-ups and not taxing people.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): In preparation for Westfield businesses were moved out of the town centre, but we need to bring people in. In the 1960’s Croydon was *the* place to come shopping. We need specialized retail and entertainment. This should not be a top-down process. We need local small, medium and large businesses and the vision to bring this about.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): Westfield was only interested in money and not in Croydon. We need to invest in local businesses and provide opportunities to lean a trade. Big shopping centres are dead and people want facilities within 15 minutes of where they live. In order to develop our local High Streets, we need to lower business rates. The climate emergency requires adaptation and this must be a front runner. Croydon needs to be at the forefront of this adaptation and to lead rather than follow.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): Croydon has strategic assets in its proximity to London and Gatwick and its schools. We need an inward investment programme to attract and keep businesses. We need to activate the town and take advantage of the upcoming Year of Culture to increase footfall in all neighbourhoods. We need to tackle crime and improve the image of Croydon so that there is more confidence to invest. We will provide start up services for our own talent and we need to develop our University sector to provide intellectual capital which will bring in business and keep it going. Investment needs to be linked to regeneration and which should done using local businesses.

**Jason Perry** (Con): Regeneration of the town centre is vital. Destination shopping is not dead and they will work with Westfield and Hammerson who own much of the town centre and apply political pressure. They would bring inward investment to Croydon and are aware the working from home has made a difference. In Thornton Heath they would fix the broken windows, graffiti and rubbish and people would not want to invest as it is now.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): Told us about his national and international TV news appearances and reputation until Andrea asked him to stick to Croydon.

Westfield will not happen. We need High Tech. I have already started a Croydon Tech Hub to train, repair and fix technology. He will create an indoor stadium with basketball and other sports near the station. Croydon will be noted internationally whereas now it has the worst borough council in London.

Q3. Housing: a) How will you ensure there is affordable housing so that the young can afford to live here rather than pricing them out through gentrification? b) How will you ensure that rogue landlords maintain the properties they rent out?

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): I was brought up on a Council estate and have met a lot of tenants and talked to them about their housing needs and problems. The housing account is ring fenced and is separate from the Council bankruptcy. This account is not in trouble. The Council housing problems are down to poor management. There has been no stock condition survey and no analysis of the complaints coming in. There needs to be a management shake-up and a systematic complaints analysis to make sure tenants get a decent service. Noise and ASB are not dealt with and the service has hit rock bottom. Tenants will be involved in every major decision with a charter governing customer service standards and rapid appraisal of complaints. The housing stock is ageing and this needs to be factored in.

**Jason Perry** (Con): The Council does not build social housing anymore (for the past 8 years) but this could change quickly. They have become a slum landlord. He would adopt a tenants’ charter, manage the housing contract and treat tenants with respect.

**Farah London** (TIP): Her own father has had mould in his home. The repair team do not turn up. The Council needs to respond to tenants’ complaints. There should be no Council Tax for those on low incomes and there must be more affordable development.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): I am a landlord myself. Last night I had a call about a burst pump at 11.20pm and I was there today. The Council did not go the Regina Road. They have only one inspector per 1,000 homes. The Councillors and housing department are not doing their duty.

We need education for tenants on how to take care of a house in Croydon. There are ways to solve and fix problems. Local contractors should be used and the problems should be addressed and fix in a single visit.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): There are problems with the accessibility of the Council and with the culture of Council Officers and Councillors. The Councillor in charge of housing had no idea about why Regina Road had got into that appalling condition and this applies across the borough. The Mayor would be there to find out what was going on, not to say “Nobody told me”.

We must assure affordability to help people achieve their goals of an independent life. Housing should cost not more than one third of salary and the minimum income in each community should be used in housing criteria. 80% of market value is not affordable. There are two parallel housing crises – private and Council.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): I bought my property 20 years ago but now the housing market is broken. However, there is not a shortage of properties. Homes should be for living in and not for investment. The Right to Buy is part of the problem because Councils could not invest the money from sales in more housing, so the shortage of Council housing was a result of Tory government policy.

Last night he was at the protest for Regina Road. People need safe, affordable housing.

Q4. Young People, Loss of Community Assets, Hate Crime, Issues for Labour:

1. Last night a Council Cabinet meeting agreed to sell the Former Addington Community Centre where I run a boxing club for young people. Closing the building with nowhere for young people to go and will increase ASB. People do not feel safe at night.
2. There are differences between the N&S but the Council has brushed over this dynamic. How can Labour not accept responsibility for what is happening. Labour has ruined Croydon for 10 years. What are you going to do about it and why has it not already been done?

**Jason Perry** (Con): We have great young people in fantastic communities. There are a range of communities across the borough and together we can make things better. Assets should be transferred to local communities to do what they need to with. Anyone seeking public office should be tolerant.

**Farah London** (TIP): Money would go to the youth. I have worked with youth across London. They cannot achieve if there are no opportunities. We need to empower them, set up clubs in schools and set up clubs for 6-21 year olds across the borough. We must not waste our youth so that they end up on the streets involves in drugs, ASB, gangs etc.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): When a child suffers hate crime at school and it is covered up, it does not serve the kids or society. For years they have preferred to be misleading, not authentic. A school in Woodside has a new head. There are only 3 students but it was not reported. This has to end.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): I have taken part in demonstrations to try to prevent the sale of community assets. There have been devastating cuts to youth services. We believe in “Nothing about us without us”. We must get people involved. All hate crime victims need to be part of the solution.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): As a youth worker, my wife has made a huge difference to lives. A proper youth service is not expensive. On community assets, children can only do karate etc if there are facilities where it can be done. It is insane to sell off assets for very little money. If local communities are organised they should have the power to run these assets. The sale of the Lodge at Grangewood Park was rushed through to prevent the community taking action. An inclusive youth service is needed. It is art of prevention of hate crie and it starts with proper funding.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): The sad thing is the reduction of the youth service. It is a non-statutory service and so has been cut and cut. We do have the Legacy Centre funded by businesses, charities and the Council. We need a mapping exercise of what the youth have access to, especially here. The Legacy Centre is to get a recommissioned contract.

I am standing because I accept there have been massive errors and I want to help fix it. I will not be turning my face away but wading in to get it sorted out and will not be closing the Legacy Centre. It is hard to choose what to commit to. My mission is to help right around Croydon. People want good things to happen.

The Council ran down the internal financial management so they did not know what had been spent. They also made bad investments but I was not on the Council and did not vote for the budget. Jason did. It was a massive corporate failure and I feel a responsibility to come and try to help. I have been inside he mayoral system and I know how to make it work for Croydon. I will institute a scrutiny system inside the Council and restore openness, transparency and honesty. We should be glad we have a democracy but some people screwed up really badly.

You will get great value for money and a high value cabinet who will be interviewed for their jobs to ensure they are capable and competent. The Mayor does not need to be cosy with the cabinet and can bring in outside advisers. We can fix this together and work on improving the economy for the town. The Mayoral election is about a person not a party. I condemn racism, homophobia and hatred of all sorts.

Q5. Cross-Party Working: Barbara asked if the candidates would work cross-party. (Andrea requested one-word answers).

**Peter Underwood** (Green): Yes

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): Yes

**Farah London** (TIP): Yes

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): Yes

Graham asked Val if this included the Cabinet.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): Many of the current Cabinet are moving on and will not stand at the next election. I will interview everyone on the cabinet and anyone who cannot answer my questions will not be included. The leadership, chief executive and Council are all responsible. 50% of Labour Councillors will be different.

**Jason Perry** (Con): I voted for 2 budgets but they were not delivered. I am open to cross-party Cabinet working but no one who has crashed the bus should be in the Cabinet next time.

Q6. Accountability/Whistleblowers: The Council lost £1 billion but there is no accountability. The Councillors go door to door trying to get elected but when people have issues the Council do not respond and do not answer phone calls. We elect the Council but we should also have the right to get rid of them.

**Peter Underwood** (Green): The Head of Scrutiny will be from a different party to ensure independence. We will publish charts to show the work the Council is doing. This needs to be clear as well as Mayoral transparency.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): We would also have a second party for scrutiny. It is incredible that Val says this is not her Labour. There is a problem with how officers and Councillors interact. There needs to be alternative parties there.

**Jason Perry** (Con): We would go around the borough meeting people and hearing from them. Scrutiny would be from the opposition. We wanted scrutiny included in the Council constitution but Labour said “No”. With regards to surcharges, Tony Blair unfortunately abolished surcharges, otherwise we would be levying a surcharge on this Council for the money they have lost.

**Farah London** (TIP): We would hold Councillors to account. No bullying would be tolerated. People can always talk to me and I am prepared to give my mobile phone number.

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): I have done corporate governance for 30 years. There will be a contract between me, you people and the Council. It is time for those complaining to fill out forms with their complaint in detail so they will be properly dealt with.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): There will be proper scrutiny and whistleblowers will be supported. I have worked with Tories, Greens and other parties. I have been on parliamentary select committees and support opposition leadership of committees. I was retired but I want to come back because I know I can make a difference. It is the people of Croydon who matter and working together makes sense.

Q7. Mayoral Commitment, Pay Scales, Accountability and Communication:

1. The new housing officer is on £180K and this money would be better going to Regina Road. When people complain they are not answered. What can we do it things go wrong again?
2. Will this be your full-time job?
3. In the role, will you remove people incapable of doing their jobs?

**Peter Underwood** (Green): Yes I would be full-time. I will look at a sort out the pay structure and will not be deaf to what people are saying. All contracts will be published and available for the public to see, especially the Veolia one which has been locked away.

**Rick Howard** (Lib Dem): Yes, I would be full-time and I am currently putting arrangements in place for others to run my business if I am elected. I will ensure accountability and bring Council services to pop-up hubs around the borough to make them accessible and easy for the public to interact with the Council

**Gavin Palmer** (Ind): I will be full-time and remove those who are incapable of doing their jobs. There is too much management and not enough front-line staff. I would move Council meetings around the borough an I would be at every Crystal Palace home game so people could speak to me there.

**Jason Perry** (Con): I would be full-time and would challenge and fine contractors not doing their jobs. I will open up the Council books to scrutiny and complaints will not fall on deaf ears.

**Val Shawcross** (Lab): I would be full-time with no other interests and would take only half the salary. I would develop a flatter organisation with quality on the front-line and hold Mayor’s Question Time sessions around the borough. I would judge people on their past record. I am 63 and you can look at my record and achievements. I sacked a Director of Social Services within 2 hours of taking office because he was watching cricket. I want to do this because the public matter.

**5. Date of Next:** THCAT hopes to hold a hustings meeting for Councillor candidates on 19th April and will publicise this as we did the current meeting.

CWM 31.1.22