

CCC

Croydon Communities Consortium

Annual General Meeting Monday 24 November, 2014 at 7pm Council Chamber Croydon Town Hall

Present: Elizabeth Ash (Chair), Mahbub Sadiq Bhatti, John Bosco Saldana, Michael Buckley, Pauline Childs, Roger Clark (Treasurer), Sean Creighton, Charlotte Davies, Mike Fuller, Bridget Galloway, Beryl Gowers, David Gowers, Zahair Hanna, Glen Hart, Elizabeth Jatto, Mark Johnson, Ganapathy Kasinathan, AJ Kennedy, Josi Kiss, Dave Lee, Clive Locke, Pett Norville, Matloob Raja, Alan Reynolds, Amares Sakar, Cllr Mike Selva, Peter Staveley, Janet Stollery, Gordon Thomson, Peter Underwood, Julia van der Vord, Mike van der Vord, Sabrina Williams, David White, Adrian Winchester, Osman Yousuf.

Apologies for absence were received from Mohammed Aslam, Cllr Sara Bashford, Kathleen Bensberg, Tim Buick, Philip Chapman, Sheila Childs, Ayyaz Choudry, Jay Ginn, Raj Gopal, Heather Hardie, Cllr Maddie Henson, David Freeman, Cllr Wayne Lawlor, Maureen Levy, Linda Morris, Grace Onions, Paul Pinder, Margot Rohan, Sanjay Shah.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the AGM, introduced the committee and noted that in the absence of a secretary, the meeting would be recorded.

The minutes of the previous AGM, held on 15 November 2013, were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

In relation to a question tabled about an Equalities statement it was confirmed that the founding committee had an Equalities statement in place but that the working group had looked at and agreed to work to the Council's Equalities policy. This policy is currently under review.

Chair's Report

The Chair presented a report detailing the events of the year. The full report will be posted on the website.

In summary, the report included noting that the group had been made more inclusive as activities, including meetings and the AGM, are now open to anyone with an interest in Croydon. Previously the AGM had been held with only the committee permitted to attend.

Details of activities included putting in place a series of meetings in excess of those requested under the terms of funding, even though activities had ceased for three months around the election period. A website and social media presence had been built.

Time was given to explaining the resignation of the Vice Chair, and the reasons behind this, as well as the ongoing work being undertaken to investigate the issue, in association with others.

Various distractions to the group's work were outlined which impacted on the committee's plans.

The forward plans for the group were outlined, including 'rebranding' CCC with a more representative name, building the list of contacts and developing the website. Reaching out to different groups, including hard to reach groups, was another priority, with all of this relying on sufficient help.

Thanks were noted to the main funder, Croydon Council, to the current committee and those who had served during the year, to many who had helped to advertise meetings and to Margot

Rohan in particular, who has provided much support to the founding committee, and handover to the current one.

Questions were invited from the floor.

- a) The amount for a hall hire in dispute was questioned. This was stated as £30 being the agreed fee, but varying invoices and emails had been received, stated differing amounts. The largest was around £85. The outcome of this will be reported when known.
- b) A series of questions followed from an individual, relating to Equalities and use of funds but the main focus was on the allegation of Islamophobia against the Vice Chair Clive Locke (CL), based on a retweet of some else's tweet on a personal account. The individual referred to basing these questions on information circulated on social media and blog posts. Dealing with these and a few others extended the AGM by a further 40 minutes.
 - i) Regarding representation of the community in meetings - Representation of Croydon communities has been a core aspect of CCC's work. Representation from and the sharing of information about our meetings by community groups and Residents' Associations has been spasmodic. Some groups are very proactive, for example, KENDRA, OCRA. ECRA, Norbury Residents Associations are very effective at disseminating information. CCC are aware though that some receive information but do not attend or pass the information on to their membership. Youth are welcome at our meetings but CCC are not at the stage of actively engaging with this group as CCC would like. Work continues to build up contacts. The new committee have put in place a more inclusive Constitution, meaning that anyone is welcome to attend.
 - ii) Regarding a question about the allegation against the ex-Vice Chair. - The committee confirmed that the investigation has been hindered by lack of information. Those working on this have struggled to substantiate the claims made. Another member confirmed having done considerable work on this. They were extremely concerned at many aspects, from the press gaining information before the individual or the groups were even aware, the protracted delay in bringing the 'incident' to anyone's attention, that the local paper had reported that the incident had been reported to police but that the police have no record of this alleged report to them or the incident, and the clear agitation of the matter on social media from a few parties. Those who have looked at the situation were of the view that CL should register a complaint. It was also offered that if this was reported to the police then due process should have been followed. If the Council have not waited for the outcome of this then surely they have acted as judge and jury which many find very concerning.
 - iii) The Chair confirmed she has attended Croydon Police Station now on two occasions with CL and still the police claim to have no record of any report to them. This is in addition to visits made by CL preceding this. It was noted that the Advertiser presumably only reported what the Council had told them. Many had questioned why the Council had chosen to share this with the press. Why the police had no record, raised serious questions. It was reiterated that until CCC have established the facts and access to evidence, including that from those who are alleging that the retweet was not an isolated occurrence but was intentional and repeated, the committee cannot investigate or take a decision either way.
 - iv) Another made the point that this was one retweet which CL has no recall of seeing let alone retweeting. The member pointed out that CL's disability means he has no fine motor skills meaning he uses devices heavily and imprecisely.
 - v) Another offered that they had been drawn into matters, having witnessed exchanges on social media, which were unhelpful. Mediation with an individual making allegations and CCC was suggested but rejected by the individual, although CCC were open to this. The overriding concern though was that it appears on the face of it that the Council has acted as judge and jury without following a proper investigation, without giving CL the opportunity to explain, which the member considered to be a breach of power and also infringing on CL's Human Rights. The member felt that proper procedures need to be in place at the council to investigate any alleged breaches of

Equalities and Inclusion issues. The member considered that any allegations should be dealt with by an external panel.

Despite this level of detail offered the individual asked to table further comments, as follows:

- vi) He was concerned on a number of issues, including that the allegation is that it was an Islamophobic tweet. It was pointed out that this was on a personal account, not that of CCC, that nobody had reacted to that retweet. That there had been a protracted delay of many weeks before raising any issue and this had not been raised with CL at any point.
A call was received from a local reporter before even the Chair knew, before Broad Green Business Forum (BGBF) and before anybody had an opportunity to look at the issue. At the time, CL made a comment, in response to an allegation, not knowing what the retweet actually was or when it had occurred. CL has said that nobody has spoken to him from the Council. The Council have not come back to confirm that they have spoken to CL so on the evidence held so far, unless the Council comes back to refute this, CCC have no reason not to believe CL on this point.
- vii) The Chair made clear that CCC and others are still pulling the threads together. The situation was not helped by a second newspaper article. Comments made on this post were divisive. This was not helpful and CCC have tried to calm the situation down and have done so by working with others.
- viii) It was made clear that CCC will not let it lie but will also not take action against a man without evidence to substantiate the claims. To do so would breach his Human Rights.
- ix) Another made the point that it is not the Council's place to investigate but that of the Police, and if the police have no record of anything to investigate, it ends it. CL has no mobility in his hands, and uses Twitter to try to engage with the community, but he has been given no right to reply.
- x) In meetings of communities and community groups on the matter, the general consensus has been in support of CL, based on first-hand experience over time. A very strong message came through that CL works with everybody and wants the best for Croydon.

At this point the Chair tried to call the questions to a close. The individual continued, claiming not having had the opportunity to talk, or to ask questions. This member continued to speak over others and the Chair reminded all of the need to respect the meeting or leave.

The Chair pointed out that she had already been in correspondence with this individual and knew that he had been retweeting the allegations. Although time has been given to try to explain and given more information it was stressed that it was important to remember that CCC are not in a position to make a judgment one way or the other. The Chair reiterated that despite going to the police twice, there was no record of any complaint. CCC and others have asked for evidence that CL has put up racist posts – nobody can provide evidence of this.

Whilst CCC have publicly asked for any information or evidence and also put this to an individual and to the questioner in emails, nothing has been forthcoming from either. The Chair stated that CCC were publicly putting it on record again today that if anyone has anything to back any allegation up to please let CCC have that information. Without this there is little CCC and others can do.

The Chair conceded to give the individual a few more minutes if he had any other questions:

- xi) The individual stated that he had not come with any motive or intention. He questioned what procedures were in place to investigate an incidence of racial abuse. The Chair confirmed that an allegation of racism would be a criminal matter and therefore up to the Police to investigate. In this case they have no record. Another clarified that if there was a case to answer, the police would have brought a criminal prosecution. This is the Police's job. It is not that of social media, the Council or anyone else's role to be judge and jury. The member went on to say that everyone has the Human Right to a fair hearing, to appeal and for the evidence to be presented.

The member stressed that it is really important that we don't have trial by social media, that all of us have the right to do stupid things as well as the right to express ourselves freely. This is important as Croydon is actually a very cohesive borough – we do this really well – having walked round with people from outside Croydon they are very impressed by the community spirit, the bond together, that we help each other and we really ought to focus on what we do well. The member felt it was wrong to make so much of what is a minor retweet, how many people send on emails without a thought.

Having given 25 minutes to the questions raised by this individual the Chair called the questions to a halt in order to get the AGM back on track.

As the individual objected it was agreed by all present to put further questions aside and allow further questions at the end of the meeting if people wished to return to this. This was agreed by a show of hands and accepted by the individual.

Treasurer's Report

The funds of CCC, for the first six months following last year's reconvened AGM (November 2013), were not under the control of the elected committee due to there being no handover from the outgoing Treasurer.

With the assistance of Barclays, Croydon Council and Mark Johnson who was a founding committee member, access to the bank account was secured by the elected committee on 1 May 2014, when signatories were updated. The committee appreciate and acknowledge the help and assistance offered in securing access to the bank account.

During the period prior to access being gained to the funds, all expenses and costs incurred were covered by the committee, personally. It needs to be recognised that some of the costs incurred during this period were never claimed, so the accounts do not truly reflect expenditure. The committee recognises that this action was necessary and agreed, but should be avoided in future as personal liability for legitimate expenses could act as a barrier to others standing for committee.

The expenditure level also reflects the ceasing of public meetings, as requested by our prime funder, Croydon Council, in the run up to the local elections in May 2014. Meetings ceased in February and did not resume until June.

Council funds, awarded to CCC in the 2011/12 funding round, are presented in the accounts as restricted funds. Funding from other sources appear as unrestricted funds.

In the spirit of transparency and to give the membership a better idea of funds held, £3035 was showing as being in the account but payments will have gone through since and some expenses have not been paid out as yet, including AGM advertising, meaning there is less than this in the account.

Various questions were answered about the accounts as follows:

- (a) CCC have restricted and unrestricted funds. The balance of the grant money received from Croydon Council is restricted to ensure it is used in line with the funding agreement, and would need to be disbursed to fulfil a similar purpose if CCC were to disband, in agreement with the Council.
- (b) It was confirmed that CCC were in receipt of a one off grant from the Council. This is not an annual grant.
- (c) In relation to a question tabled repeatedly about whether or not CCC had a moral obligation relating to the grant, the position was made clear by various members of the committee, all taking the same viewpoint. LBC grant money must be used in line with the funding agreement attached to it. It is a straightforward contract. The funds were given to the founding committee who did not put a website or meetings in place. Had the working group and new committee not acted then the funding would have been lost.

Concern was expressed by others that this repeated questioning from one member of the audience was made to entrap the committee into something that person could use on Twitter to stir trouble. A member of committee qualified that if the person present had any genuine questions about the accounts, then please ask them.

The committee made clear that they understood that they have an obligation to use the funds wisely. In fact many of the current committee have spent personal funds to further the work of CCC and there has been no personal benefit to anyone on committee.

A member tried to clarify for the other member, explaining that it was his understanding that CCC provides an open forum for anyone to come along to a public meeting to have their say. The meetings are recorded, the notes of meeting are put up on the website, and are on public record.

Another member offered that CCC acts in line with other committees he is associated with in that CCC abides to the constitution and everyone is considered equally. There is no obligation by individuals or small groups within those organisations.

The Chair reiterated that meetings are open and have no set agenda which allows anybody to come and raise any point or any issue. This is not just sharing of concerns. Sometimes it is advertising a new initiative e.g. Just Croydon website (formerly Your Croydon).

- (d) A further question was asked about the constitution and it was confirmed that this was on the website, having been adopted at the previous AGM.

The Chair apologised for not having the capacity within the meeting to answer the myriad of questions tabled by just one individual present but explained that the committee were mindful that these questions had taken up a not inconsiderable amount of time. Any questions were invited from the others present.

- (e) The committee responded to a question to confirm that there is no payment for the use of the Town Hall for the AGM but payment is required for the refreshments.

The accounts were proposed and adopted.

Elections

Members of the current committee were willing to stand for election and no other nominations had been received. Each candidate was voted on by a show of hands.

The position of a committee member linked to a political party was raised as a potential issue in an election year. It was agreed that it would be wise for political candidates to stand back during the election period, and Peter Staveley indicated and his willingness and intention to do so.

Mark Johnson declared being a member of the Conservative Party before a vote was taken.

Chair – Elizabeth Ash - elected, with 2 abstentions

Vice Chair – Peter Staveley – elected, with 3 against and 4 abstentions

Treasurer – Roger Clark - elected, with 1 abstention

Committee members were elected, as follows:

Mahbub Sadiq Bhatti - elected, with 1 abstention

Mark Johnson - elected, with 1 against and 2 abstentions

Janet Stollery - elected, with 1 abstention

The AGM closed at 8.15pm

The Public Forum followed the AGM.