

# Council Supplementary Agenda



## 5. **Croydon Question Time** (Pages 5 - 8)

To receive questions submitted by residents in advance of the meeting.

Seven Public Questions will be heard at this meeting, which will be responded to. The questioners then will have the opportunity to ask a supplementary question based on the answer received.

The questions are as follows:

1. What is the council going to do to help residents in Oval road living with a garden adjoining to the yard at 130 Oval road, which is owned by a developer? A planning application was rejected here on multiple grounds such as access issues and loss of employment in May this year, so will the council consider to strike out this location from the Croydon Local Plan as it's not suitable for development?
2. When will the council finances be in the black so council services will be restored?
3. What is the council planning to do to keep residents safe from violence in the Old Town area?

4. Given that Croydon Council established Brick by Brick to deliver affordable homes under shared ownership on behalf of Croydon Council what procedures are in place to (a) ensure quality of service and (b) allow for feedback from those who have purchased under this scheme?
  
5. Following a successful bid to the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCFF), the GLA is funding the planting of 47 trees in Oval Road during the 2022- 23 planting season (to be planted by 31st March 2023). The UTCFF has also provided funding for establishment costs (watering and maintenance) over three years.

Please confirm that 47 trees will be planted in Oval Road by 31 March 2023.

6. Will the Mayor commit to responding to leaseholders in Messer Court directly about the safety and sale prospects for our homes? I have been fighting for this reassurance since Grenfell and wasted thousands of pounds trying to sell my property that I have been told is unsellable as it is unsafe, mainly due to unsafe cladding. Whilst tenants received updates about developments at Regina Road, leaseholders in my block received nothing. We need clear answers and a clear timeline for action. We also need to know the Mayor's action plan in relation to cladding on council owned properties in Croydon.
  
7. In the wake of horrific cases of violence such as Sarah Evered, Sabina Nessa and stabbings in our town, safety is a major concern. Croydon Parks needs to be made safe. The gates of parks in my locality are not locked which poses a serious risk to residents and needs urgent action.

When are you going to lock our parks?

The total time allocated to Public Questions is 30 minutes.

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## Question 1

What is the council going to do to help residents in Oval road living with a garden adjoining to the yard at 130 Oval road, which is owned by a developer? A planning application was rejected here on multiple grounds such as access issues and loss of employment in May this year, so will the council consider to strike out this location from the Croydon Local Plan as it's not suitable for development?

## Answer

The Council is currently undertaking a review of its Local Plan which, among other things, will look at the planning history of sites across the borough to inform future decisions regarding the suitability of allocations.

130 Oval Road is currently allocated for residential development in the 2018 Local Plan and I would encourage you to engage with the Local Plan Review process when consultations occur.

## Question 2

When will the council finances be in the black so council services will be restored?

## Answer

The Council has a legal duty to set a balanced budget each year.

When the Mayor was elected he initiated an Opening the Books exercise to forensically review the Council's finances. That review uncovered a staggering £48m of unresolved historic accounting errors left by the previous Administration, all of which will need putting right in future Budgets. This is on top of a one-off cost of £75m to balance previous years' accounts, three of which remain open.

As a result, on 22<sup>nd</sup> November the Council issued a Section 114 notice highlighting that, even with a substantial savings programme, the Council would not be able to set a balanced budget without financial support from Government.

Discussions with Government are ongoing and I am confident that with their support we will be able to set a balanced budget for the year ahead in March 2023.

## Question 3

What is the council planning to do to keep residents safe from violence in the Old Town area?

## Answer

I have met with residents and attended the local ward Panel for Old Town a number of times since becoming Cabinet Member for Community Safety. While tackling crime is primarily a responsibility for the police, and we do not control their resources, we have worked with the Safer Croydon Partnership to take a number of actions in order to address the ongoing behaviour being exhibited in the area.

The Police have identified it as a priority area and have tasked officers to patrol the area, this will continue throughout the month of December. The Council's Neighbourhood Support Officers have also supported the Police on their patrols including using the CCTV van to assist Police operations in the area.

The CCTV service have coverage of the main areas identified and have liaised closely with the Police to identify individuals who are involved in criminal activity in the area.

The Council has also recently introduced a Public Space Protection Order covering the town centre to give the police additional powers to deal with anti-social behaviour.

The Croydon Business Improvement District have set up engagement meetings with the local businesses so that they can share their experiences and also hear from the Safer Croydon Partnership about what steps are being taken by the enforcement partners.

The Youth Engagement Service has also conducted outreach work in the area to work with the young people in the area who are congregating there during peak hours.

While I appreciate this will not stop all anti-social behaviour in the area, we are taking robust steps to catch and stop those responsible.

#### **Question 4**

Given that Croydon Council established Brick by Brick to deliver affordable homes under shared ownership on behalf of Croydon Council what procedures are in place to (a) ensure quality of service and (b) allow for feedback from those who have purchased under this scheme?

#### **Answer**

Brick by Brick (BBB) was originally set up by the previous Administration to increase the supply of housing, particularly social housing, for Croydon residents to redress a shortage in the market.

Unfortunately the Brick by Brick venture has been fraught with problems and mismanagement throughout and will ultimately cost taxpayers many millions of pounds to resolve.

New homes were built for private rent, social rent, outright sale and shared ownership. Subsequently a small proportion of the homes built have been purchased by the Council as much needed council housing.

Complaints by residents should in the first instance be addressed by the organisations responsible for the properties. That responsibility may vary over time. In summary:

1. For 24 months from completion BBB will manage any defects that arise. Residents will be given the contact details of BBB's Aftercare team at handover, who will co-ordinate the addressing of issues either by the building's contractor or BBB's own contractor.
2. If residents are dissatisfied with the work of the Aftercare team, they can raise a complaint to BBB which will be managed in accordance with their Complaints Policy and Procedure.
3. All BBB properties come with an NHBC building warranty; this will provide a resolution service backed by a guarantee for the first 24 months after completion and management of defects for the following 8 years.

Rented and shared ownership properties will be the responsibility of the provider who will have their own processes in place to deal with the day-to-day management and wider complaints process, which is likely to vary depending on the organisation.

As for all borough residents, occupiers of rented and shared ownership properties also have an

opportunity to refer landlord issues to the Council where landlords fall short of their statutory responsibilities.

#### **Question 5**

Following a successful bid to the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTC), the GLA is funding the planting of 47 trees in Oval Road during the 2022- 23 planting season (to be planted by 31st March 2023). The UTC has also provided funding for establishment costs (watering and maintenance) over three years.

Please confirm that 47 trees will be planted in Oval Road by 31 March 2023.

#### **Answer**

We welcome this additional external funding to support tree planting in Oval Road.

I can confirm that the Council's trees and woodlands officer is currently working with highway officers and our contractors to install tree pits by the end of February.

This will enable us to plant all 47 trees in Oval Road by the 31st of March 2023.

#### **Question 6**

Will the Mayor commit to responding to leaseholders in Messer Court directly about the safety and sale prospects for our homes? I have been fighting for this reassurance since Grenfell and wasted thousands of pounds trying to sell my property that I have been told is unsellable as it is unsafe, mainly due to unsafe cladding. Whilst tenants received updates about developments at Regina Road, leaseholders in my block received nothing. We need clear answers and a clear timeline for action. We also need to know the Mayor's action plan in relation to cladding on council owned properties in Croydon.

#### **Answer**

Messer Court is one of sixteen remaining Large Panel System (LPS) residential blocks owned by Croydon Council.

As the Council is about to begin a period of statutory consultation over the future of three of these blocks at Regina Road, the Director of Housing wrote last month to all of the other LPS blocks to draw their attention to the Regina Road Cabinet report and to advise that resident meetings will be held during the early part of 2023 to discuss any concerns.

While I appreciate your worries, I can assure you that Messer Court meets current legislative standards, and the Council continues to maintain these homes to a good standard to ensure they are safe.

More recently, there have changes in the mortgage industry and in Government building legislation with the result that it has become much more difficult to secure mortgages on certain types of building.

I know that is difficult for anyone who finds themselves in this situation, however the Council isn't able to buy back these properties without a clear business case for doing so.

Officers are currently working on a Housing Investment Plan which will look at all the Housing investment needs across the Borough, and will include options for the future of Messer Court and the remaining 15 LPS blocks.

Regarding the cladding, I can confirm that the cladding from the first floor and above meets the current standards.

At ground floor the cladding comprises insulation and render which alone does not meet current requirements. However, because sprinklers have been fitted in each dwelling, this has been deemed a tolerable risk as part of the block's fire risk assessment. The intention is to remove the cladding system at ground level as part of the 2023/24 capital investment programme.

#### **Question 7**

In the wake of horrific cases of violence such as Sarah Evered, Sabina Nessa and stabbings in our town, safety is a major concern. Croydon Parks needs to be made safe. The gates of parks in my locality are not locked which poses a serious risk to residents and needs urgent action.

When are you going to lock our parks?

#### **Answer**

The murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa were tragic reminders of the importance of ensuring our streets and parks are safe, particularly for women and girls.

The Council recently hosted a public meeting to allow local people to share their views about public safety. Following this, the Council and Police set out their renewed commitment to keeping our community safe with a updated tackling violence against women and girls report agreed by Cabinet.

In relation to parks, a large number of parks are open spaces and as such are not lockable. Given the council's financial constraints, currently there are no plans to lock all of our parks overnight however we will of course act on any intelligence about specific incidents or areas of risk.