

Council Supplementary Agenda



7. Croydon Question Time (Pages 3 - 8)

a) Public Questions (30 minutes)

To receive questions from the public gallery and questions submitted by residents in advance of the meeting.

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

The questions are as follows:

1. You have referred to this 15% increase as a one-off. Does this mean that in 2024 this increase will be reversed? If you increase the tax again in 2024 this 15% will be "baked in". Can you please confirm?
2. What is the Council doing to promote recycling of soft plastics?
3. As South Croydon councillor and candidate for Mayor a year ago, you campaigned strongly against the council proposal for a segregated cycle lane along the Brighton Road between Purley and South Croydon.

Please set out the reasons you gave last year for why this was a bad idea and should be scrapped.

I say your reasons then were correct.

You now say the council is short of money and must avoid unnecessary expense.

Why then have you now as mayor spent our taxes imposing this dangerous cycle lane which damages travel on this key main road?

Why should we trust you?

4. I welcome that you have got the police involved regarding Croydon council finances. Can you assure the people of Croydon that if any criminal activity is discovered you will proceed to get the money back through the Proceeds of Crime Act which the government bought in?

5. With the failings of Brick by Brick from an operational perspective having been acknowledged by the council, could the Mayor please commit to providing a detailed explanation/plan for how Shared Owners'/tenants' rights are to be safeguarded and enforced against Brick by Brick with respect to their obligations under the various head leases they have entered into for the properties developed?

b) Mayor and Cabinet Member Questions (65 minutes)

To receive questions from Councillors.

Katherine Kerswell
Chief Executive
London Borough of Croydon
Bernard Weatherill House
8 Mint Walk, Croydon CR0 1EA

Marianna Ritchie, Democratic Services
020 8726 6000
marianna.ritchie@croydon.gov.uk
www.croydon.gov.uk/meetings

1.

Since Croydon's financial collapse in 2020, the Council has experienced serious, ongoing challenges. The "Opening the Books" Review uncovered the true scale of the previous Administration's financial failings. A further £161m of one-off historic errors and £49m of mistakes having to be built into the budget each and every year. As a result, Croydon is facing one of the worst financial collapses UK local government has ever seen. Putting that right will require incredibly difficult decisions.

Without the additional income generated by the increase in council tax, the Council would need to make an extra £20m of cuts on top of the £36m savings we are already having to make.

That scale of service reductions in one year would have been dangerous and put vital services to vulnerable residents at risk, as well as everyday services such as rubbish and recycling collection and clean and safe streets.

Whilst our financial position remains challenging, it is not right that we consistently turn to local taxpayers to pick up the bill of the previous Administration's failures. Although we will not be able to reverse this year's increase, we have been clear that the above the cap council tax rise agreed this year was a one-off and that we will not seek to increase council tax above the national referendum cap again. This year's 15% increase will be built into the base budget going forward.

I know that the rise in Council tax has been challenging for many residents in Croydon, that is why we also introduced a new £2m Hardship Fund, in addition to an enhanced £33m Council Tax Support Scheme to support residents who are struggling to make ends meet.

2.

Croydon Council is committed to recycling and delivering on our aim to reach 50% recycling by 2030.

A waste composition analysis study undertaken last year showed that more than 13% (by weight) of the average rubbish bin is made up of plastic that could have been recycled.

In order to address this our waste services team will be undertaking a communications campaign aimed at advising residents about the carbon impact of their plastic waste. This will encourage them to take action to reduce it by providing information on the simple steps our residents can take to ensure plastic does not unnecessarily end up in their rubbish bin.

3.

Thank you for your question.

The Brighton Road cycle scheme was agreed by the Council prior to my election as Mayor. The cycle lane has been funded through £550k of Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding, which the Mayor of London allocated from Transport for London (TfL).

I have personally opposed the Brighton Road cycle scheme since it was initially proposed. Whilst we need to provide safe routes for cyclists, I also recognise the concerns that Brighton Road may not be the right location for this kind of cycle route, given the wider impact it has on the effective management of the highway and the potential to increase congestion on an already busy route.

Whilst I was not able to stop the scheme going ahead, I insisted that TfL agreed significant changes including protecting parking for local businesses, reducing the number of 'wands' and ensuring access to the recycling centre wasn't affected. Although I welcome these changes, the Council needs to use this experimental phase to listen to residents and consider that feedback before making a final decision about whether this location is right for a permanent cycle lane.

The scheme was introduced under an Experimental Traffic Order which means that it will come to an end in 18 months, though a further decision may be taken earlier. I would strongly encourage you to share your views on any or all elements of the scheme (positive or negative) on the Council's official [consultation webpage](#). The results of this consultation will be fully considered when any decisions are made about whether to retain the cycle lane following the trial period.

4.

Following the decision of the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee to refer a number of documents to the Metropolitan Police, I can confirm that they are considering the facts and evidence relating to the council's financial position and governance failures. As these enquiries are still on-going, it would not be appropriate to comment in detail at this stage on whether legal action may be taken or any sanctions that could be imposed.

As is clear from the decisions I have consistently taken and the actions I have strongly supported, I remain committed to ensuring that those responsible for the significant financial losses the council has suffered are fully and properly held to account.

5.

Brick by Brick have now sold almost all developed properties to third party private entities or, in some cases, to the Council. Where the freehold or headlease of a property has been purchased by the Council or by a private third party entity, the obligations contained in any lease arrangements with Shared Owners/Tenants are protected within the transfer of the property. Therefore, the responsibilities will vary depending on the particular property.

A report to Cabinet providing an update on Brick By Brick will be presented on 26th July 2023 and further work will be carried out later this year with a report planned to be presented to Cabinet before Christmas. The later report will set out steps to winddown Brick by Brick, which will include details of any responsibilities to Shared Owners/Tenants.

In the meantime, if Shared Owners/Tenants have any immediate concerns, it is recommended that they approach the freehold/ headlease owner of their property in the first instance.

July 2021 report

<https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/documents/s31209/Brick%20by%20Brick%20-%20Part%20A.pdf>:

In the event that the recommendations are approved the Council will also incur costs of additional support above that incurred to date during the build out estimated at £100,000 in the current year and £60,000 in 2022/23 and a yet to be determined cost of providing an ongoing level of support to private house purchasers over a number of years after the completion on site either through a residual Brick by Brick or through other means. The nature of support to private house purchasers will be the subject of a further report in due course.

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