

Council

Meeting held on Monday, 25 January 2021 at 6.30 pm.

This meeting was held remotely.

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Maddie Henson (Chair);
Councillor Sherwan Chowdhury (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Hamida Ali, Muhammad Ali, Jamie Audsley, Jane Avis, Jeet Bains, Leila Ben-Hassel, Sue Bennett, Margaret Bird, Simon Brew, Alison Butler, Jan Buttinger, Robert Canning, Richard Chatterjee, Luke Clancy, Chris Clark, Pat Clouder, Stuart Collins, Mary Croos, Jason Cummings, Patsy Cummings, Mario Creatura, Nina Degrads, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Sean Fitzsimons, Alisa Flemming, Felicity Flynn, Clive Fraser, Maria Gatland, Lynne Hale, Simon Hall, Patricia Hay-Justice, Simon Hoar, Steve Hollands, Yvette Hopley, Karen Jewitt, Humayun Kabir, Bernadette Khan, Shafi Khan, Stuart King, Toni Letts, Oliver Lewis, Stephen Mann, Stuart Millson, Vidhi Mohan, Michael Neal, Tony Newman, Steve O'Connell, Oni Oviri, Ian Parker, Andrew Pelling, Jason Perry, Helen Pollard, Tim Pollard, Joy Prince, Badsha Quadir, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Pat Ryan, Paul Scott, Manju Shahul-Hameed, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Robert Ward, David Wood, Louisa Woodley and Callton Young

Apologies: Councillor Janet Campbell

PART A

1/21 Disclosure of Interests

There were none.

2/21 Urgent Business (if any)

There were no items of urgent business.

3/21 Announcements

Madame Mayor

Madam Mayor, Councillor Maddie Henson, wished everyone present a happy New Year. Since the Council had last met, she had been working on three new fundraisers. One of which being Lighten up you Lockdown. This would be a one-hour session to teach techniques for coping with stress, finishing with a 10-15 minute hypnotherapy session. She said hypnotherapy helped her and her husband greatly during the early stages of giving birth. Secondly, as her last event as Mayor, she would be organising free online taster sessions working with Musical Bumps and Legacy. This was aimed at families with

young children and urged anyone to pass contact details of a group who may be interested in taking part.

In relation to Covid guidance, Madame Mayor urged everyone to obey the lockdown rules. A turning of the tide was beginning to be seen against the terrible pandemic, however still, too many people were becoming ill and tragically losing their life. She encouraged everyone to stay safe for the sake of their family, friends and neighbours and to stay at home.

The Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council echoed the reminder that everyone should follow the national lockdown restrictions. Infection rates were gradually seen to be reducing in London, but still remained high. There had recently been Members of the Council who had fallen ill during this time and she wished them a full and speedy recovery.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Hamida Ali, reported a positive and constructive first meeting with Tony McArdle, Chair of the Improvement Panel introduced by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). She stated that Tony McArdle expected the Panel to be confirmed and formally announced by government shortly and they were preparing for their work with the council; the first piece of work being to review the council's submission request for a capitalisation direction. The Panel's terms of reference would be confirmed shortly, however it would function as non-statutory and advisory to the Secretary of State to provide assurance on Croydon's capacity to deliver.

4/21

Croydon Question Time

Public Questions

Madam Mayor explained that Croydon Question Time would commence with 30 minutes of public questions to the Leader and Cabinet Members. In accordance with advice from the Government and Public Health England, it was not possible to hold public meetings in the Town Hall. As a result, members of the public were unable to ask questions from the public gallery in the Council Chamber. Questions had been received by email up until 12 noon on Friday 22 January 2021. Public questions that were received of a purely factual or of a detailed nature would be given a written response within three weeks of the meeting.

Madam Mayor noted that there was a public question received from Jane Tucker relating to the reduction of social care packages, which could not be answered during this meeting due to Councillor Campbell's absence. Jane Tucker would be sent a full written response and the answer would be published on the council website.

Madam Mayor noted that there were a number of questions in relation to libraries which were currently subject to ongoing consultation and ensured residents that those questions would be fed into the consultation.

Madam Mayor read a question from H. Lindsay:

“The total number of visits to Croydon libraries in 2015/16 was 1,951,000 and by 2019/20 had fallen to 1,465,000 a decrease of approximately 25% over the whole of Croydon. For Sanderstead library, the visits were 35,230 in 2015/16 and 35,222 in 2019/20, the only Croydon library with no decrease whatsoever.

Why is this factor being ignored?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration, Councillor Oliver Lewis, thanked H. Lindsay for his question and stated that they were currently in a statutory libraries consultation and he encouraged anyone with an interest in the matter to participate. In answer to the question, he said that factor was not being ignored and the number of visits to the libraries was a factor taken into account during the consultation. The figures for Sanderstead library in 2019/20 reflected an additional day of opening in June and July 2019 and additional visits could also be attributed due to Selsdon Library being closed for a period of refurbishment. Even accounting for the additional visits, visits to Sanderstead Library remained consistently low. He noted there were many other factors, as well as number of visits that were taken into account during the consultation.

Madam Mayor read a question from J. N. Gibbons:

“The library has space for other than the current activities and, is therefore capable, without extensive work of absorbing Library Plan proposals.

Why has this not been factored in?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that they were looking at the potential of the community running libraries at zero cost to the council. He encouraged communities to submit any plans or ideas for absorbing additional council services or activities into library buildings.

Madam Mayor read a question from M. Leach:

"Sanderstead library is on the Local List of buildings and structures within Croydon considered to have special local architectural or historic interest by the public and the Council. The garden has a preservation ordered tree and a memorial rose bed as well as a community wild flower garden.

Will any future proposal honour the commitment in the Conservation and Heritage Policy?"

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that heritage issues would be properly considered as part of the consultation as proposals were developed.

Madam Mayor read a question from J. Kempsall:

"The existing location occupies a central position in Sanderstead Ward and is served by a frequent [5/hour in each direction] service with stops right outside as well as being in walkable distance for much of the community.

Has this consideration been factored into the evaluation?"

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that accessibility and accessibility via public transport was being considered and would be taken into account in shaping the future proposals.

Madam Mayor read a question from A. Kennedy:

"The alternative library is given as Selsdon, 1.3 miles away. This is in fact 2 miles away with no direct bus service and will, therefore require a change of bus. Because of this, closure will encourage car use to access it as the only viable alternative transport option.

If Selsdon is considered an acceptable alternative, what assessment of transport modal change has been made and with what effect on traffic congestion and exhaust pollution?"

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that Selsdon Library was an alternative to Sanderstead Library. Throughout the consultation they were looking for proposals of community run models, in which case there would be no increase of travel if such a model was implemented. In the occurrence of an alternative model not being found, residents had the choice to access either Selsdon Library or any other library in the borough. The council encouraged residents to use public transport, practice active travel wherever possible and to minimise car journeys.

Madam Mayor read a question from A. Bell:

"The library has step free access for disabled and young mothers etc. which would make it impossible for these residents to access other library facilities easily.

What assessment has been made to ensure such groups are not disadvantaged?"

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that whilst much of Sanderstead Library was accessible, it was important to consider that the toilets and baby changing facilities were only accessible using the stairways. It was important that public facilities, and all facilities within those buildings in use by the public, were accessible to all members of

the public. Selsdon Library, and all other libraries in the borough, were compliant with disability legislation. As part of the consultation the survey asked residents for information on accessibility, transport and their potential impact from the proposals. He encouraged anyone impacted to take part in the survey and responses would be reviewed.

Madam Mayor read a question from C. Hibberd:

“The library is of community value because it is the direct provider of a number of services, which have social, and community value, such as access to information and literacy support, promoting social cohesion residents need, closer to where they live.

To maintain these key objectives of the Library Plan what alternative facilities are proposed for Sanderstead residents?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that they were consulting on a range of options, including potential future use of Sanderstead Library, and encouraged residents to put forward any ideas of community models of ownership and operation that may continue some of those services. The financial challenges the council faced meant that they had to reduce spending across services. If no alternative model was found, important services would be maintained in other libraries across the borough. He encouraged anyone who had an interest in the library service to participate in the consultation and make their views known.

Madam Mayor read a question from J. Simpson:

“It is the only publicly owned community facility in Sanderstead and could form a library hub and be a centre for more services thereby reducing costs as set out by the council’s own policy regarding hubs.

Has this been considered and if not, why?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that the challenge for the council at this time was to drastically reduce spending across a range of council services. The consultation was seeking to identify ways in which libraries could be run at zero cost to the council. They encouraged any residents to submit ideas on how that could potentially be achieved.

Madam Mayor read a question from D. King:

“Sanderstead Ward has a higher rate of people over the age of 65 than Croydon as a whole, so residents should not be further inconvenienced by its closure. Elderly & Vulnerable residents are already socially isolated and this would impact on their health and wellbeing.

Has this been taken into consideration and with what conclusion?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that there would be an Equality Impact Assessment as part of the consultation. There were many older residents who were actively engaged and connected in Croydon and the council would encourage them to take part in the consultation. In a situation where no viable or cost neutral options were put forward for Sanderstead Library, residents would continue to have access to library services elsewhere in the borough. Croydon would continue to provide an adequate and statutory library service going forward and the council would ensure they provided the best service they were able to provide given the financial resources available.

Madam Mayor read a question from J. Newberry:

“Six local schools and four local nurseries have made regular use of the library. If Selsdon is considered an acceptable alternative:

- a] what investigations have been made as to whether these organisations will be willing to travel further or not,
- b] how their journeys will be made, and
- c] what effect the additional journeys will have on traffic congestion and exhaust pollution?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration encouraged all users of Sanderstead Library to participate in the consultation and make their views known. Residents should continue to make use of a continued provision at Sanderstead Library if a cost neutral option was brought forward as part of the consultation, or they should make use of other library services in the borough. In the latter case, he encouraged residents to make that journey in environmentally friendly modes of transport.

Madam Mayor read a question from Michael Seabrook:

“What is the situation with Broad Green library. Are you going to close it, are you going to propose involvement with the community and are you going to sell the building?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that the consultation on the future of library services was currently live, including Broad Green Library. Through that process, they hoped that residents would come forward with community run models of ownership and operation that were cost neutral to the council. If that was not possible, the council would have to review the next steps which could result in a library closure.

Madam Mayor read a question from Sean Creighton:

“In view of your administration’s renewed commitment to openness, transparency, listening and engagement, please explain why several Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs are not responding to emails and detailed submissions for consideration in relation to papers being considered by

Cabinet and Committees, In particular please explain why I have received no replies to the following:

- (1) An email to you and Stuart King sent on 19 January in relation to concerns about the 'Savings' Consultation.
- (2) An email sent to Jane Avis on 16 January in relation to the Revised Selective Licensing Scheme, HMOs, PRS and Planning, PRS and COVID, PRS and Refuse and Fly-tipping.
- (3) Emails sent to the Chair and members of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on 3 December and emails sent to the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee on 9 December in relation to the Scrutiny Review of Report In the Public Interest and PWC review of Brick by Brick and other companies.
- (4) An email sent to Debbie Jones on 13 January, on the suggestion of Councillor Stuart King, in relation to schools and COVID."

In response, the Leader of the Council thanked Mr. Creighton for his question and for raising the issue of transparency and how important it was for people to have access to information. She apologised that he had not received a response to his emails referenced in the question and she would alert colleagues. Next month there would be more information for Council to consider, following the Cabinet meeting on 18 February 2021. This would bring reports on the future of Brick by Brick and the matters of the council's assets, and looking ahead further to March 2021, Budget Cabinet. The Leader encouraged Mr. Creighton, and any other residents who were interested, to read the reports published as part of the agendas to those meetings which would provide detailed information on the matters of the council.

Questions to the Leader

Councillor Jason Perry, Leader of the Opposition, welcomed Tony McArdle to Croydon Council and hoped he would contribute a greater sense of direction for the organisation. On 22 February 2021, My London published an article in which Councillors Newman and Hall gave their views on the bankruptcy of the council. Councillor Jason Perry stated that the article failed to mention that it was the Labour Administration's Cabinet who stacked up £1.5 billion of council debt, equating to: £15,000 per hour since the Administration took office, the loan of £200 million to the council's failing developer, the reduction of reserves to £7 million and the bankruptcy of the borough seen by the issuing of two Section 114 (S114) notices. Instead of taking responsibility, the Administration chose to blame the government and Covid, despite the unfavourable Report in the Public Interest (RIPI) from the independent auditor which concluded otherwise. Councillor Jason Perry asked the Leader why she endorsed the disingenuous venture of Councillors Newman and Hall into the public arena.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that the information given by Councillor Jason Perry was either inaccurate or lacking context. The Labour Administration inherited £720 million of council debt from the outgoing Conservative Administration in 2014. Secondly, she highlighted that two-thirds of the total borrowing was based on capital programmes such as infrastructure, which included schools and housing.

In his supplementary, Councillor Jason Perry stated that the RIPI clearly referred to corporate blindness and failed transformation projects, whilst the Administration complained of the government and Covid. He said that the council could not move forward whilst it allowed disgraced councillors to publically brief against the Administration and he asked the Leader why she allowed that to happen. In response, the Leader stated that the Administration had acted swiftly and decisively to address the issues raised in the RIPI, which was published in the first formal day in her position. Since publication, action plans had been developed; there had been consultation with the non-executive committees; an updated comprehensive improvement plan had been developed which included over 400 recommendations; and a comprehensive submission to government requesting the important capitalisation direction to stabilise the budget had been written. She stated that Councillor Jason Perry was not focussing challenge on the relevant tasks at hand for the council.

Councillor Jamie Audsley asked what the strategy was for negotiating with central government to ensure the success of the Croydon Renewal Plan.

In response, the Leader stated that the success of improvement, particularly the bid for the capitalisation direction, was the priority of Administration and to tackle the challenges ahead directly in an open manner. This tasking had been supported by other organisations advising and assisting Croydon, including the Local Government Association (LGA) and Camden Council. As the Leader of the Administration, she approved and would present the submission to the Secretary of State. The renewal plan incorporated cultural, behavioural and organisational change where the council was undergoing continued engagement with staff as part of the broader work ahead.

In his supplementary, Councillor Jamie Audsley commended the strong set of relationships displayed. He asked the Leader what she thought the Opposition's role was in the process, bearing in mind that it was that party who held the majority in central government. He noted that the Leader of the Opposition had been a member of Croydon Council since 1994 and his political tactics were dated and unconstructive. The Leader replied that she believed and expected the Leader of the Opposition to join in their call for financial assistance in the interests of the residents of Croydon.

In reference to a scrutiny meeting held in February 2020, **Councillor Robert Ward** stated that the CEO of Brick by Brick said that he could not recall an example where the company had been asked a question by the sole shareholder, the council, which had not been answered. The former Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services, Councillor Alison Butler, at the

time had indicated agreement with those comments. Councillor Robert Ward secondly stated that the original £30 million cost of Fairfield Halls appeared to have doubled. He asked whether Councillor Alison Butler had been asking the right questions in her former role, or if her questions were not being answered and no subsequent further action was taken. He asked the Leader if any of those cases should result in the removal of the whip from Councillor Alison Butler and that she be advised to resign as a councillor.

In response, the Leader stated that the Administration was focussed on securing the assistance needed to stabilise the budget, part of which was responding to the recommendations to the RIPI. Some of which alluded to how assertive the council was as the sole shareholder in some of the company structures. Speaking as the Chair of the Shareholder and Investment Board, she said that the focus of the Board was on the future of Brick by Brick. She noted that some of the issues Councillor Robert Ward mentioned were being addressed through discrete pieces of work, including members having received information on a value for money review looking at the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls.

In his supplementary, Councillor Robert Ward referenced an occasion during a scrutiny committee where he said that Councillor Oliver Lewis stated that the cost of Fairfield Halls was £42.6 million. He said that Councillor Oliver Lewis claimed this was because it was a cost through Brick by Brick and bared no cost to the council or the Croydon taxpayer because the money was found by releasing the value of development potential of the land. Councillor Robert Ward asked if in light of those past comments, if Councillor Oliver Lewis should be removed from his Cabinet position. In response, the Leader said that the reviews surrounding the issues raised would answer a number of the questions asked. The RIPI raised questions about how the council had ensured it was discharging its stakeholder responsibilities in relation to its company interests, and as a result of the specific work of the strategic review of Brick by Brick and other council companies, there were external auditors conducting the value for money review. The council would reflect on that work, once completed, to understand what needed to be done and learnt going forward.

Councillor Clive Fraser asked the Leader to reflect on the Administration's ongoing commitments to the Governance Review implementation, and the associated implementation panel, in the context of her prior involvement in the cross party working group.

In response, the Leader said that both groups were committed to looking at the council's governance in their 2018 manifestos. It was important work to look at the experience of all councillors in discharging their role, particularly following the survey conducted which brought to light issues experienced by backbench councillors. A paper on the agenda would address the pace of the implementation, affected by the financial challenges of the council with the range of work taking place at the time, which would be concerning to some councillors. They were keen to make progress on the Governance Review recommendations, but it was noted that it was also important that the review

was being seen together in the context of the range of improvement work the council was undergoing. The recommendations from the governance review would be rigorously monitored in their delivery and it was important the improvements were achieved.

Questions to Cabinet Members

Pool 1

Madame Mayor opened the first pool of questions to Cabinet Members. Cabinet Members Councillors Stuart King, Muhammad Ali and Callton Young were invited to make their announcements, to which there were none.

In reference to the forward strategy for capital, **Councillor Jason Cummings** said that the Administration had made it clear that the council intended to continue to lend money to Brick by Brick despite its poor financial performance. He said that in previous reports to Council it had been stated that the company was in default on its current loans and Councillor Jason Cummings asked if this was still the case. Councillor Stuart King, Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal, responded that the matter of Brick by Brick's future support and situation in relation to the loans would be reported to February Cabinet which would provide detailed information.

In his supplementary, Councillor Jason Cummings stated that the loans to Brick by Brick he was referring to were of the value of around £200 million and he asked if they were still in default of those. In response, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal confirmed they were in default on some of the loans. He stated that the important element to answer was the details of active management being undertaken by the council through the newly appointed directors to the Board, through work by both Members and officers, to protect the taxpayers of Croydon. The report to Cabinet would be subject to scrutiny and an appropriate forum to respond to concerns about the complex matters.

Councillor Robert Canning described the excellent work of the council's graffiti removal team in the past. In light of the financial challenges for the council, he asked what arrangements were now in place for the removal of graffiti in Waddon and across the borough.

Councillor Muhammad Ali, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, replied that last year the council streamlined its graffiti removal service and since December 2020 that service has been undertaken by the council's highway contractor FM Conway. The council priority was the removal of offensive graffiti on council land, including inflammatory words or images, any forms of attack on an individual group of people, graffiti containing swear words and graffiti containing sexually explicit obscene words or images.

In his supplementary, Councillor Canning asked what advice he would give to residents who saw graffiti in their street that was not racist or offensive and wanted it removed, and secondly, if they were able to clean it themselves if it

was on council property. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon stated that if the graffiti fitted the description of offensive graffiti, it should be reported to the Love Clean Streets smartphone app, attaching a photo, which would be forwarded to the council contractor. For offensive graffiti on private land, the council's enforcement team would work to contact the landowner to ensure the removal of the graffiti as quickly as possible. Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that under the new service, they would not be able to prioritise removal of non-offensive graffiti at this time.

Councillor Gareth Streeter asked what proactive measure had been taken to engage with Cypress Primary School during the recent Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTN) consultation.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon stated that all relevant local stakeholders were informed of the consultation. The Traffic Management Advisory Committee had made a commitment to continually engage with all local stakeholders and a decision about the future of the scheme would be made in due course.

In his supplementary, Councillor Gareth Streeter refereed to a Sunday Telegraph article which described the stress and pain that staff of Cypress Primary School were experiencing within the LTN in their area, to the point of considering resigning. Croydon needed good teachers and they should not be driven away. It was well documented that the LTN scheme had made life unbearable for many residents and had impacted business at an already difficult time. He asked for reassurance that the Cabinet Member would listen, support residents and scrap the LTN scheme. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon told Council the record on the School Streets scheme for Croydon. The council had implemented 26 School Streets, one of the top boroughs in London, which ensured children had safer access and cleaner streets and council had always engaged with schools in the borough. The decision of the LTN in question would be made in due course and the comments of Councillor Gareth Street would be noted and taken into consideration.

Councillor Leila Ben- Hassel stated that local government had experienced chronic underfunding from central government over the past 10 years which had particularly affected the council's ability to manage the growing demand on adult's and children's social care services. As a result, many local authorities had turned to develop a portfolio of investments to generate revenue. She asked whether any of Croydon Council's investments over this period returned any revenue to the general fund. Considering the known areas of growth the council would face in the coming years, she secondly asked if the council would consider an investment portfolio going forward as a tangible course of action if the council were to take a most robust approach whilst learning lessons from the RIPI.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal stated that the council's investments directly secured £1.7 million from Croydon Park Hotel; £2.5 million from the Colonnades Leisure Park; and £400,000 each from

Vulcan Way and Purely Way, which in one year delivered approximately £5 million for the council. However since those gains, the Croydon Park Hotel had gone into administration and as a result were unable to make their rent payments to the council. The RIPI clearly identified the need for the council to better manage its corporate investments, where past failings were evident in the issues the council faced following the hotel's collapse, which the council would address. The Cabinet Member confirmed there were no plans for any further investment portfolios. He further highlighted that recent changes to the Public Work Loans Board (PWLB) meant that it was less likely that local authorities were likely to use the PWLB for investment for yield purposes.

In her supplementary, Councillor Leila Ben-Hassel raised concern over the growing number of households in temporary accommodation and asked the Cabinet Member to provide an update on whether it would be possible to repurpose the Croydon Park Hotel to temporary and emergency accommodation. In response, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal explained that after the Croydon Park Hotel went into administration, the council began to explore what alternative means were available to put the asset into productive use. An option considered was whether the hotel could be repurposed to provide emergency and temporary accommodation. A business case had been developed by officers in the council, however following a detailed review it was confirmed that it was not affordable given the further capital investment and lead in period required. The Cabinet Member advised that a paper would report to Cabinet in February 2021 detailing alternative proposals for the future of that site.

Councillor Andy Stranack made a Point of Order in relation to comments made in the press by the former Leader and former Cabinet Member for Finance & Resources in regard to investment yields. The Monitoring Officer advised this did not qualify as a Point of Order. The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal agreed to respond to the comment and stated that the Colonnades Leisure Park continued to generate a net surplus return to the council, along with Vulcan Way and Purley Way. He went on to clarify that Croydon Park Hotel was making an annual net return to the council when the rental income was being paid, but over the past 12 months, that rental income had not been paid which lost the net contribution and was costing the council money due to securing and insuring the site.

Councillor Luke Clancy asked how much revenue the council was expecting to generate from the Automatic number-plate recognition (ANPR) cameras planned to operate at the Crystal Palace and South Norwood Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN), and secondly, whether that figure was included in the borough wide projection 2021/22 budget for expected revenue from ANPR of just over £5 million.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon replied that it was his opinion that the specific part of this question would not be appropriate to answer as it was based on a decision that had not yet been made.

In his supplementary, Councillor Luke Clancy stated that the sum generated from the LTN in question was over £1.9 million per year and noted that in some calculations this could almost be doubled. He went on to say that the council could expect to generate several millions of pounds in the coming year on ANPR, recognising that the revenue generated would be used in accordance with relevant spending regulations, and he asked how the public would believe this scheme was more than just a money-maker for the council. He stated that this would result in general funds being removed from the department to help balance the budget because additional ring-fenced money generated would allow such process. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon stated that the money generated would be automatically be assigned on road traffic management spending. He added that further detail on these issues had previously been answered at past Cabinet and scrutiny meetings and it was difficult to comment on a scheme which was yet to be agreed.

Councillor Karen Jewitt asked for an update on recycling statistics in the borough. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon firstly thanked frontline workers within the council and Veolia for their excellent job maintaining essential waste and recycling services in the face of many challenges through the pandemic, particularly staff affected by Covid. The Cabinet Member went on to explain that in terms of recycling waste, according to the most recent data from the financial year 2019/20, Croydon had achieved a recycling rate of 49.22%. Since the service change in September 2018, landfill waste had reduced and recycling rates had increased making Croydon one of the top six performing boroughs in London and above the national average for recycling rates. This had contributed to the service being shortlisted for two national awards and the Cabinet Member noted that the credit must go to the residents of Croydon.

In her supplementary, Councillor Karen Jewitt stated that residents were active and involved in reporting fly tipping and missed bin collections to ward councillors and the council. She asked what more could residents do to help address the fly tipping problem and how could the council do more to support that effort. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon agreed that the community had a role to play in improving services and reporting issues to quickly rectify issues and help the council better manage contractor performance. Over 95% of fly tips were removed within one working day of notification, which was greatly supported by resident reporting through the Love Clean Streets smartphone app. The Cabinet Member explained that the council was serious about enforcement and reassured that the efforts were not only towards the removal of fly tipping, but identifying the minority of people who were involved in the criminal act.

Councillor Michael Neal asked if there had been any evidence gathered to show that the introduction of low emission parking permits had improved the local air quality.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon stated that it was important to take into account the various policy measures in relation to

addressing air pollution and climate change, to which this was just one. It should be noted that the positive impact of those policies would not be seen overnight, but there was constant review on how the policies were impacting and achieving some of the key policy objectives.

In his supplementary, Councillor Michael Neal stated that some studies referenced by the council in relation to the low emission parking permits were not related to Croydon and he asked why they were being rolled out. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon said that he had established why, which was to encourage people to change their behaviour and move energy production away from fossil fuels to combat the effects of climate change and pollution. These policies were backed up by national government and the Mayor of London.

Councillor Robert Canning stated that following the onset of Covid pandemic in 2020, Croydon Council quickly provided assistance to households who had challenges paying their council tax. He asked if there were any plans to continue any kind of assistance in the next financial year.

Councillor Callton Young, Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance, agreed that the council had acted quickly in 2020 to allow residents to defer their council tax instalments by two months as an early fiscal reaction. In addition, the council used its discretionary powers, under Section 12a of the Local Government Finance Act, and announced its approval of a new emergency scheme to support residents' payment of council tax in 2021. This was funded by a £4.3 million Council Tax Hardship Fund financed the MHCLG. A further grant of £5.2 million for the same purposes had been provided by MHCLG to the council and would be implemented in 2021, in accordance with the rules of the grant funding to helping vulnerable residents financially impacted by Covid. The Cabinet Member informed Council there was a long standing council tax support scheme in place available to any Croydon resident who was in receipt of low or no earning and was facing difficulty paying council tax. This was planned to continue and was means tested.

In his supplementary, Councillor Robert Canning commended the council tax support which had been made available and asked the Cabinet Member for further details on how successful the measures were by sharing the take-up of support. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance stated there 3,381 residents had benefitted from deferring council tax instalments for two months in 2021. There were 19,625 transactions in relation to council tax payments in the previous year and the council paid £2.2 million. There was a remaining £2.1 million which would be paid before the end of the financial year. In relation to the council tax scheme, the council paid £33.5 million to 2,820 working age claimants and 7,888 pension age claimants. He concluded that overall, the uptake was positive and had helped vulnerable residents.

Councillor Vidhi Mohan stated that over the next four years the Administration would have to borrow £150 million to simply balance the

budget, which would cost £11 million per annum in loan interest. He asked the Cabinet Member which services would be cut and how many jobs would be lost just to service the debt generated from the loan.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance stated that the specific answer to that question was not possible to provide at that stage as they were yet to secure the capitalisation direction from MHCLG. He said that the Members of the Council of both political groups should work together in finding ways to minimise job losses.

In his supplementary, Councillor Vidhi Mohan described to the Cabinet Member what services £11 million can buy the council if it was not used to purely service debt. The five libraries in Croydon had a £250,000 annual operating cost, and additionally if the council wanted to reinvest in the five buildings, the total cost would be £700,000. He asked the Cabinet Member to tell residents and staff how their services would be affected and how many would lose their jobs. In response, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance stated that the Administration had inherited a debt of £740 million when they came into power in 2014, accounting for half of the current total debt, and added that all councils financially operated with debt. Croydon Council was currently in a financial crisis and there were tough decisions to be made which the Administration would consult on. This process had already started and at the end of that process they would duly appraise the impacts.

Pool 2

Madam Mayor opened the second pool of questions to Cabinet Members. Cabinet Member Councillors Oliver Lewis and Alisa Flemming were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Oliver Lewis, Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration, reminded residents watching that that the statutory consultation on the future of library services in Croydon had begun and he encouraged anyone with an interest to participate. Throughout that process they hoped to establish some community run models which were cost-neutral to the council. The Cabinet Member updated Council on the leisure contract and explained that they had applied for the recently established UK Active Fund for leisure providers, which would help mitigate costs for centres and leisure venues, and he would provide a further update on the response from the fund.

Councillor Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning, said her vote of thanks to Nick Pendry, the departing Director of Children's Social Care, who was part of the Croydon's Ofsted journey from the beginning. She praised his fantastic work supporting the team throughout that journey to embed systemic practice model to children's social care and secure the 'Good' Ofsted rating. The Cabinet Member welcomed Roisin Madden as his successor and looked forward to working with her.

Councillor Jason Cummings stated that a significant number of employees within the children's services remit had either already lost their job, or may as well lose them now because of the council's financial position. He noted that the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning sat on the committee that agreed the severance package that was paid to the former Chief Executive, to which she voted in favour. He asked the Cabinet Member how that financial package was justified.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning stated that she was not able to comment on the content of that meeting in question. She noted that any supplementary information relating to that meeting would need to be approved by the Monitoring Officer.

In his supplementary, Councillor Jason Cummings dismissed that he was asking for any details of the package and asked again, for what he considered as non-confidential, why the Cabinet Member thought the financial package was justified. In response, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning stated that in order to fulfil that information request she would need to go into confidential information which she was not able to publically discuss. She said that if this answer was not satisfactory, in the next instance the Monitoring Officer should be called to comment.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the meeting in question was held in private session and therefore confidential.

Councillor Sean Fitzsimons stated that nearly 10 years had passed since the East Croydon Master Plan proposed a pedestrian link from Chilton Road to East Croydon Station and the McAlpine contractor had started construction on the Morello Cherry Orchard Road site. Considering those factors, he asked what progress had been made with Network Rail and Govia Thameslink Railway to move the porta cabins to ensure that pedestrian access was open once the new residential buildings were completed in two years' time.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that it was important for both residents of Addiscombe and the Town Centre that the pedestrian bridge was completed. He understood that council officers were in contact with Network Rail officials and he had spoken to Sarah Jones MP. He hoped that the combination of these would increase the Network Rail view of importance of this work and they would do what they could to facilitate the requirements.

Councillor Stuart Milson asked the Cabinet Member which of the priority one and priority two issues identified within the external audit report in relation to parks health and safety did he find most concerning.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that park health and safety was no longer part of his portfolio, however at that time he said he found the repairs to play equipment in playgrounds concerning. He had worked with officers to resolve those issues as soon as they arose. At times, there were difficulties in terms of supply chains of importing parts to

repair bespoke equipment, which could often be costly. He said he took health and safety very seriously when his role covered that remit.

Councillor Muhammad Ali, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, whose portfolio covered this service, stated that health and safety was a primary concern. They had begun taking feedback on savings proposals for parks, and as part of that, the council would be engaging and working with local residents and Friends of Parks to strive to make parks more accessible and secure.

In his supplementary, Councillor Stuart Milson stated that the audit would have taken place whilst parks health and safety was within Councillor Oliver Lewis' remit. The audit found three priority one issues and four priority two issues, which included fundamental issues of there being no overall strategy, missing risk assessments and missing fire risk assessments still outstanding. He asked how the Cabinet Member could be fulfilling his role if they were not aware of these details in an audit report. In response, the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon confirmed that he had seen the report and discussed the findings with council officers in terms of making sure there was an overarching strategy for managing parks. There would be a piece of work on how parks would be managed going forward once feedback had been gathered from local residents. Health and safety would be one of the key issues which would be addressed by the strategy.

Councillor Pat Clouder stated that Covid had an enormous impact on Croydon's young people which included, in her view, the government's shocking and chaotic handling of exam results in August 2020. She recognised and commended the hard work and care from school staff, social workers, youth workers and everyone who had supported young people through this difficult time. She asked the Cabinet Member for an update on the present situation of schools.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning thanked Croydon head teachers of both primary, secondary schools and special schools for the tremendous effort ensuring young people were still receiving the support they required. She said that schools had been open since March 2020 and a huge amount of work had been completed to ensure that school buildings were Covid safe and to also facilitate online teaching. They were currently undertaking a check to find out how many young people in the borough did not have access to a laptop and were not able to access one of the government schemes. They were also currently working in conjunction with Sarah Jones MP, who was leading a campaign to refurbish laptops, and local businesses to provide devices to families in need. The council had particularly focussed on one-to-one support to young people who were cared for by the local authority. The Cabinet Member said she would be holding a briefing with all Members to give an overview on the work that had taken place within specific wards and schools.

Councillor Stuart Millson asked the Cabinet Member to specify the weaknesses in the agreement between the council and Brick by Brick that

were identified by the internal audit report into the Fairfield Halls delivery and what he would be doing to address those.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that there were a number of recommendations made in that report specifically around governance. He said that the capital development of Fairfield Halls was never part of his portfolio, however he was a part of the culture side of the agreement and championed securing a world class heritage and restoration of the building, which was achieved. When it was safe to do so, it was important Croydon worked with the operator to ensure the delivery of high quality arts and entertainment in Croydon Town Centre.

In his supplementary, Councillor Stuart Millson said he welcomed high quality arts to the borough. He stated that the Cabinet Member's position seemed weak in his suggestion that he had no involvement in the capital development when in fact he was part of the Cabinet who delivered the venue. At the General Purposes and Audit Committee on 14 January 2020, the Head of Internal Audit for Croydon Council suggested that the approach with Brick by Brick of there being no formal contract or conditions in place relating to the quality or deadlines was highly unconventional and he was not aware of that being used for other delivery in Croydon. Councillor Stuart Millson said that if the Cabinet Member was interested in Fairfield Halls becoming a top venue, then he had to have been interested in the key details on how the building was delivered to the best standard. With this history, he asked how residents could have confidence in him to deliver the Borough of Culture programme in 2023. In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that it was important to learn from the arrangements of the capital delivery of Fairfield Halls, which was a process currently being undertaken by the Administration.

Councillor Clive Fraser referred to Paragraph 4.2, School Place Planning, of the Education Estates Strategy report on Page 21 of the Agenda, which stated that pupil projection indicated sufficiency of mainstream school places for both primary and secondary schools for the next three years. He asked the Cabinet Member to comment on the reasons for that.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning stated that they would be discussing that report in detail later in the meeting. She explained that the council had based its school place sufficiency for the local area on birth rate projections from the Greater London Authority (GLA), demographic affects from big planning developments and took into account in-year transfers. For some schools there was now a 7% surplus rate, following years of averaging 5%.

In his supplementary, Councillor Clive Fraser asked if the capital investment since 2014 contributed to that outcome, and if so, he asked for more detail about that investment into the creation of school places. In response, the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Learning stated that since 2014 they have had a mixture of free schools delivered. They were continuing to look at inward and outward migration of school places and over the next

few years were looking to develop a more detailed SEND strategy, which would bring into focus any further provision of places and continue wider discussion.

Councillor Stuart Millson asked if the Cabinet Member was aware of the conflict of interest of the Executive Director of Place continuing to chair meetings of the Fairfield Halls Delivery Board after her becoming the Director of Brick by Brick. He secondly asked, if the previous was true, why he allowed the appointment to take place. He stated that this was a priority one issue from the audit into the Fairfield Halls delivery and this happened while Councillor Oliver Lewis was the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that it was important to learn lessons from the advice given in the audit report. The Administration was committed and focussed in getting the governance arrangements right going forward.

In his supplementary, Councillor Stuart Millson stated that his previous question was not answered and he asked the Cabinet Member if he was aware of the conflict of interest, and if so, why he allowed the appointment. In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that the appointment to Brick by Brick was not within his remit or power. He reiterated that it was important to get the governance arrangements right going forward and learn the lessons from the report.

Councillor Chris Clark asked for an update on the latest uses of Fairfield Halls during the recent lockdown.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that most recently it was used as a test and vaccination site in the push to overcome Covid.

In his supplementary, Councillor Chris Clark described that residents were keen to see the Fairfield Halls, a centre of cultural excellence in Croydon, and asked when it would be able to re-open safely and for the public to attend events. In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration agreed that they were all keen to see the re-opening and audiences to flock to the venue for top quality entertainment. In recent weeks, tickets went on sale for events later in the year and they hoped that customer confidence would remain high. The council would support the operator to open the venue in a safe and profitable manner.

In reference to the question asked to the Leader earlier in the meeting, relating to a scrutiny meeting held in February 2020, **Councillor Robert Ward** stated that Councillor Oliver Lewis said that the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls would cost £42.6 million at zero cost to the council or Croydon taxpayers because the money had been found by releasing the value of the development potential of the land. He asked the Cabinet Member if he stood by that explanation and the sum of £42.6 million.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that the sum quoted was what he was told at that time in February 2020. Since, there was an issue for Brick by Brick about how they brought the development forward in terms of their internal finances. Additionally, it was important that the council found the real figure of the true cost of the Fairfield Halls refurbishment and what caused the issues with the progress of development of the site.

In his supplementary, Councillor Robert Ward asked if a sum nearing £1 million was paid to BHLive in liquidated damages. He said that if that was the case, this would have been a direct result of the failure to deliver which was part of the Culture, Leisure and Sport portfolio. In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration said that some liquidation damages were paid to BHLive as there were issues that had implications for them.

Councillor Toni Letts stated that the former award winning Planning Department was currently under tremendous pressure, caused both from the pandemic and staff working from home. The council's financial position had also meant that a number of staff had left the council. She asked what the Cabinet Member could do to improve the services within the Planning Department to ensure a greater turnaround of applications, whilst ensuring that the health and wellbeing of the staff was protected under those conditions. Councillor Letts gave her thanks to the staff in the Planning Department for their hard work.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture and Regeneration stated that he recognised pressure had built up in the Development Management Department within the council. This had been two-fold pressure; an increase in applications alongside resourcing pressures. In response the council had moved staff from Spatial Planning into Development Management to try and work down the backlog in cases, which had so far made some impact and they hoped would reduce the impact in coming weeks. Staff would continue to work remotely until it was safe to return to the office.

Pool 3

Madam Mayor opened the third pool of questions to Cabinet Members. Cabinet Member Councillors Jane Avis, David Wood and Manju Shahul-Hameed were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Jane Avis, Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services, informed Council about the prosecution of Anthony Roy at Croydon Crown Court the previous Friday, published in national newspapers, who had been convicted of failing to apply to Croydon Council's borough wide landlord licensing scheme and breaking the council prohibition order against renting out a flat to a lone tenant. The 'flat' in question was a converted former bank vault and inspectors found category one hazards relating to fire safety, lighting and excess heat. Following the ruling, the rouge landlord was on the Mayor of

London's rouge landlord register and the council were applying to the MHCLG's national register.

Councillor David Wood, Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Resilience, told Members about the annual Holocaust Memorial Day event due to take place virtually at 12 noon on Wednesday 27 January 2021. The event would be broadcast on the council's website and speakers included Madam Mayor, colleagues from the Croydon Synagogue and Mr. Sok Din who survived the Cambodian Genocide. He thanked the organisers for putting together the incredible event in the challenging circumstances.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed, Cabinet Member for Economy, Recovery and Skills, updated Members on the business grant distribution. She explained that the government had announced a number of different Covid support grants to support businesses. Each grant was for different business types and based on specific periods of time relating to national or local restrictions. Businesses had been using one simple form to apply for the 10 grants available, including the local restriction support grants for the mandatory closure of business and a separate form for the additional restriction grant. In respect of the local restriction grant, the council had issued 1344 businesses which totalled £2.41 million. Phase One of the additional restriction grant distributed £490,000 to 264 businesses and Phase Two of the discretionary grant was due to open the following week. This would widen the eligibility criteria to home based businesses and businesses outside hospitality, retail and the leisure sector. Additionally as part of Phase Two, there was a new business, growth and innovation grant fund; a scoping and implementation of a new business support programme; and an evening and night time grant fund.

Councillor Lynne Hale stated there were many vulnerable residents in Croydon who from time to time needed support and said it was fantastic that the borough had a long standing Welfare Rights Team which helped residents claim benefits they were entitled to as well as generating income for the council. She asked if the Cabinet Member agreed it was a value service to residents.

In agreement, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services said the Welfare Rights Team was incredible and it had been utilised by residents. Unfortunately due to the council's financial situation, that provision would be integrated into other services and additional support and advice was provided by a number of voluntary sector organisations. The Cabinet Member said that she wished there was not a need for this type of service and the welfare situation in Britain had been further exacerbated by Covid. She reassured Members that the supply of the service would continue but how that was coordinated would change.

In her supplementary, Councillor Lynne Hale stated that the Cabinet Member had said at a previous meeting that the ethos of the service would be embedded in other council departments. She questioned how an ethos alone would be tangible help to any vulnerable residents. She explained that this

specialised service saved the council money in the long-term, whether that be through revenue or cost avoidance work. It was not fair to expect the voluntary sector to pick this up to the standard of an experienced and specialised service, established 25 years ago, whilst having their own funding reduced. Councillor Lynne Hale asked for a detailed cross-departmental cost-benefit analysis and for the decision to disband the Welfare Rights Team to be reviewed. In response, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services commended the passionate defence for the service and said that no Member would be in disagreement. She said that her ethos statement was in relation to Gateway Services and went on to say that there were benefit teams across all departments in the council, where some duplication had been identified.

Councillor Chris Clark asked what support was available to small businesses as they prepared to navigate the changes of Britain leaving the EU.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Recovery and Skills stated that the council were receiving enquiries from business communities, London Business Hub and Croydon Business Partnership about the incoming rules which covered a range of topics including rules on import/exports, data, working in the EU and hiring. Last week, the London Business Hub had organised a session about how to navigate the new EU landscape for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) which a number of Croydon businesses attended. There was another session planned to cover HR, visa and employment regulations, and a second session, on how leaving the EU affected GDPR and data sharing. She explained that the London Chambers of Commerce, a partner of the council, provided free advice for businesses. The Cabinet Member stated that all the information listed could be found in the council's business newsletter which was circulated to over 7,500 businesses in the borough and provided regular updates on Brexit and other related issues.

Councillor Jeet Bains stated that Brick by Brick was not delivering council homes and had provided no income to the council. In light of this, he asked the Cabinet Member if it was appropriate for the CEO of Brick by Brick to be positively tweeting about generating revenue.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services said she was not able to answer because there was a review of Brick by Brick underway. The Leader of the Council, who was responsible for Brick by Brick in her role, said the outcome of the review would be reported to the next Cabinet meeting in February 2021. The outcome of the review would inform the Cabinet decision on the future of Brick by Brick, which would be focussed on the risk to the public investment already in the company whilst balancing the benefits in terms of the original objectives to deliver more affordable housing.

In his supplementary, Councillor Jeet Bains reiterated his specific comments about the appropriateness of what he felt to be a flippant and inaccurate tweet

by the CEO of Brick by Brick in a public forum, at a time when there was a lot of public scrutiny of the council on the matter. In response, the Leader said the future review was relevant to this comment and the council's response. In terms of the council's shareholders interest in Brick by Brick, the Leader chaired the Shareholder and Investment Board which was a platform for constructive dialogue with Brick by Brick company directors who were appointed in November 2020 to ensure that communication was as constructive as possible going forward.

In relation to the announcement earlier regarding rogue landlords, **Councillor Joy Prince** stated that much of the casework in Waddon could be traced back to poor standards of housing in the private sector. She accepted there was not a flat standard of landlords or tenants. She asked the Cabinet Member for an update on the application for a new selective licensing scheme which had been waiting for approval from the Secretary of State since July 2020.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services said that many landlords do perform well and do well by their tenants. However, any renting sector that was not regulated and closely monitored, rogue landlords would enter the field, which they wanted to stop using a new selective licensing scheme. The application was in the latest stages of assessment by policy officers and the legal team at MHCLG and was currently being reviewed by senior officers. Following the review, the policy would need to be passed by the Secretary of State.

In her supplementary, Councillor Joy Prince asked for statistics or examples which supported the effectiveness of a selective landlord licensing scheme. In response, the Cabinet Member for Homes and Gateway Services stated that the council had one in place some years ago, but now the government had widened the ability for a local authority to prosecute. There had been 57 financial penalty notices issued to landlords in the past few years, helping the borough's private tenants. It was noted that the private rented housing sector was the biggest growing sector in Britain today, where there 58,000 properties in Croydon alone.

Councillor Andy Stranack said that Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA), along with a number of other leading community organisations, issued a statement which outlined the devastating impacts of the Administration's cuts program to the voluntary sector in Croydon. In the statement they invited the council to partner with the voluntary sector to develop a Croydon Communities Renewal Plan. He asked if the council had responded to the request.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety and Resilience firstly stated that no official decision had been made yet on the cuts to the community sector and it was a process which would be involving the community sector in terms of understanding the impacts of possible cuts on their activities and how they would be able to deliver. They would need to be realistic going forward in what services they think they would not be able to deliver, given the possibility of the funding cuts. In terms of the timeline, each of the organisations with funding allocations had been individually contacted

for feedback on the process and the council was currently working through their responses. There were aspects the council were keen to speak to the voluntary sector about and he provided assurances to organisations that there would be an open and honest dialogue about the position going forward and how to best serve residents.

In his supplementary, Councillor Andy Stranack raised concern over the Cabinet Member misleading Council and residents. He asked for confirmation if the cuts programme would have an impact, in light of the community ward budget scheme being suspended. He stated that the council had taken back money from various voluntary sector organisations from the community funds. He asked again if the council had responded to the statement raised in his previous question, and if they had not, what date they were planning to respond. Additionally he raised, there was an outstanding response awaited from the Leader of the Council in relation to the Appropriate Adult Volunteering Scheme. The Cabinet Member for Communities Safety and Resilience replied by giving assurance that the council would respond to both letters, however he was unable to provide a specific date. He stated there were a number of factors they were looking at in respect of the response and how the council responded to the specific questions raised. The council was mindful of the importance of the decisions and discussions in question and the issue would remain a priority.

Madam Mayor invited the Leader to respond on the matter and she agreed with the Cabinet Members response. The Leader said she had responded to the questions and had email correspondence with the CVA.

Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice stated that successive lockdowns have had a negative impact on the highstreets and borough district centres, which she considered to be the lifeblood of the local economy. She praised the Cabinet Member for Economy, Recovery and Skills for her work to ensure funding was distributed to local businesses, whilst practicing due diligence that was required to properly enact those. She was pleased to see that Shop Local banners were appearing in shop windows and asked the Cabinet Member when this initiative would be rolled out across the borough.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Economy, Recovery and Skills thanked the councillor for her praise and prompted the shop local campaign social media tag line #LoveCroydonShopLocal, which was used on banners across the borough. Prior to Christmas, the council was able to install banners in Addiscombe, Crystal Palace Triangle, South Croydon, Coulsdon, Thornton Heath, Broad Green and Selsdon. The Cabinet Member stated that during January 2021 the council would be installing banners in South Norwood, Kenley, Coulsdon, Norbury and New Addington. A further set of updated banners would be rolled out in February 2021. The council was providing support through the business grant advice and information and the comms team were preparing a webpage to help promote and direct the public to support local business. Additionally, ground stickers would be installed to those locations when weather permitted.

Governance Review Implementation

Councillor Clive Fraser introduced and outlined the report which recommended to delay the introduction of three previously agreed recommendations of the Governance Review until May 2021. He explained this was due to financial and resourcing constraints the council currently faced, whilst considering the additional resourcing required to implement the changes. Some elements would be scaled back and Council was being asked to delay amending the Constitution to establish Cabinet Member Advisory Committees (CMACs); the definition of Key Decisions; and the procedure for Council rules. These would be delayed until the 2021/22 municipal year, subject to appropriate resources and capacity being available in the Council budget 2021/22. He updated Council that there would be four meetings of each CMAC per municipal year and it was hoped that they would commence within the first two months following Annual Council 2021. Councillor Clive Fraser moved the recommendations of the report.

Councillor Jason Perry, the Leader of the Opposition, told Council that a huge amount of effort had been given to the working of the Governance Review, and as a follow up, the implementation working group to formulate the new arrangements. He stated that it was disappointing that the Administration's mismanagement of the finances had led to delays of the proposals. Councillor Jason Perry seconded the recommendations, but stated this was in the spirit of the continuation of cross-party cooperation to be fostered through the later stages of the implementation of the CMACs.

Councillor Sean Fitzsimons, the lead member of scrutiny, expressed his disappointment in the delays of the implementation of the Governance Review recommendations. It was clear from the events of last year that the governance of the council required improvements. The reasons for the delay were laid out in the report and he accepted the assurances given. He further expressed his concern over the wording 'when resources allow' and described the phrasing as a weak commitment to deliver and he would like more certainty to be recorded and agreed. He hoped that the necessary resources to implement the recommendations would be included in the 2021/22 budget and a section be included to cover recommendations in addition to the number listed by Councillor Clive Fraser. He called for an implementation timetable to be published as he felt that many backbenchers would like to see the recommendations implemented, in particular those relating to access to information which had been the crux to a number of problems for councillors.

In response, Councillor Clive Fraser stated that some of the issues faced by council were caused by insufficient scrutiny and challenge to officers from Members, which was highlighted in the report from the auditors. The governance review was part of the improvement journey for the council, as described in recommendation 1.2, and the delays needed to be viewed in the context of the council's financial situation. Once the council had a clearer understanding of their status going forward, there would be a better idea on the timelines and detail of the Governance Review implementation and the discussion should flow as part of the wider conversation and budget process.

Ahead of the vote on the recommendations contained within the report, Madam Mayor advised Council that there were 40 Labour Members and 29 Conservative Members in attendance.

The recommendations as set out in the report were put to the vote and all were agreed unanimously.

6/21

Council Debate Motions

The Mayor read out the first Council Debate Motion on behalf of the Administration:

“This Council recognises that Croydon’s system for local governance must always reflect the need for strong democratic engagement and accountability. This Council commits to consider a resolution, based on a detailed report to be presented to Council at an ECM, to hold a referendum on the council’s governance model in Autumn 2021, so that residents can decide the best model for Croydon. A directly elected mayoral model will be an option in this referendum, alongside the Leader and Cabinet model. In the event that the residents of Croydon vote for a change from the council’s current governance model the resulting election can take place at the next local elections scheduled for May 2022.”

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Hamida Ali to propose the motion.

Councillor Hamida Ali stated that in October 2020, the new Administration committed to being resident focussed, open and transparent whilst working on the changes the organisation required to stabilise the council’s finances and governance. The aim was to create a culture of transparency and accountability with value for money at the heart. In the spirit of those commitments, the Administration welcomed the debate on the best system of governance; whether the rules on which political administration in control was determined by the largest political group or by an individual determined by a popular vote. The date of this vote would be based on when public health grounds would allow, and should be considered as they were in the context of the country currently remaining in its third period of lockdown with no scheduled exit date.

It was noted that the Minister of State for Regional Growth and Local Government, Luke Hall MP, wrote to the organisation regarding a new relaxation of regulations and encouraged, rather than directed, to hold a referendum in May 2021. Following this later that week, the Prime Minister described the timings of relaxation as an open question, and as a result, the Minister of State for Constitution and Devolution, Chloe Smith MP, notified political parties that canvassing nor leafletting were permitted during lockdown. The judgement of the Administration was that holding elections in May 2021 was far from certain and the focus of the organisation was to stabilise its financial position by balancing the budget and removing the

Section 114 Notice, which would enable them to facilitate and fund this debate and to hold the referendum in the Autumn 2021. She hoped that residents would understand the reasoning for this position and informed Members that there would be an Extraordinary Council Meeting to debate the strengths and shortcomings of each option. Councillor Hamida Ali moved the motion.

Councillor David Wood seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Jason Cummings stated that this motion was not about giving the people of Croydon what the record breaking petition deserved. Labour ignored the call by 1000's of residents asking for a vote on a democratically elected mayor at the time it was initially submitted and the Administration did everything they could to block the request. The motion was not preparing the ground to fix an election date before MHCLG took the matter from their control. It was stated that Croydon Labour always ignored the will of the residents in the borough and pursued the interests of the Labour party. Furthermore, Councillor Jason Cummings stated that the previous political leadership, Councillors Tony Newman and Simon Hall, only a few days before had surfaced in the press by writing an article where they denied responsibility for the disaster they had created. He expressed dismay at how the current Labour leadership could authorise such an article which effectively blamed MHCLG for the council going bankrupt and let the disgraced ex leadership sit on the backbenches and keep the whip.

Councillor Jason Cummings stated that it was the hard working staff of the council and residents of the borough who were paying the price, suffering redundancies and the cutting of services, whilst the leadership of the Administration refused to take the pay cut the Opposition had already taken. He further suggested that the current leader was too weak to take control of the party and properly accept responsibility, manage their own councillors and face the electorate. The campaign for a democratically elected mayor demonstrated that the people of Croydon want their say on how the borough is run and they were unhappy with the actions of the Administration.

Councillor Ian Parker told Council that they were debating this motion for reasons which were rooted in the failings of the Administration. Councillor Parker stated that the Administration had failed to listen and respond to the residents of Croydon in the area of Planning; the arrogance of consulting on Planning and then ignoring where objections were routinely overlooked. Seeing the closure of leisure facilities, recycling centres and libraries; community ward budgets frozen; and residents in LTNs ignored. Residents who were the electors were routinely ignored.

The reputational damage caused by the Labour Administration would take years to recover, however it could be done. It was stated that Croydon owed a huge debt of gratitude to the residents and their Residents Associations around Croydon for the massive role they had played in collecting signatures for the Democratically Elected Mayor of Croydon (DEMOC) petition, which the Administration did their utmost to block. The motion, it was stated, was a consequence of bottom-up pressure from residents and a direct result from an

incompetent Labour Administration. Councillor Parker reported that the momentum for a DEMOC was growing as residents began to recognise the failings of Croydon Labour. This call for a DEMOC was about fairness in the system of electing Croydon's leader and moving to a system where a vote was equal across the wards and towards a borough that represented all residents, beyond narrow party political interests. The current model of governance had failed this borough and a DEMOC would be a route to bring the change needed.

Councillor David Wood stated that as a committee member responsible for democratic participation he was pleased to second the motion and residents should be given a choice in how the council was governed. It was noted that after the new Leader took control in November 2020, she gave a commitment to listen to residents and hear their voice. She also gave an early commitment to meet petitioners and did so as soon as reasonably practical, now welcoming debate. In deciding the right time to hold the referendum they had to consider a range of factors in these unprecedented times, most notably Covid, and the Administration felt the best course of action was to plan the vote in Autumn 2021. Councillor Wood stated that this decision was not reasoned in any way as a rebuff to the government. To hold the vote in Autumn would mean that it would be less likely affected by Covid and reduce uncertainty following vaccinations, in terms of public health of residents and the risk of low turnout. Additionally, it was difficult to make the case that this discussion was what residents needed as the council's priority was trying to manage the response to Covid and the financial challenges. Councillor Wood stated that the Administration was committed to delivering the referendum.

The motion was put to the vote and was unanimously carried.

The Mayor read out the second Council Debate Motion on behalf of the Opposition:

"This failing Council has bankrupted Croydon. To plug the £65 million annual black hole in its finances they have proposed a devastating cuts package that hits the most vulnerable residents in Croydon the hardest.

These terrible cuts will decimate vital services that the poorest in our borough rely upon. It will also severely cut funding to essential voluntary organisations and charities that have done so much to help local people to get through the pandemic.

In order to protect the most vulnerable in Croydon, this Council will cancel the proposed service cuts, and maintain funding for our vital voluntary and charitable sector."

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Andy Stranack to propose the motion.

Councillor Andy Stranack told Council that last week was one of the most depressing weeks he had to endure as a local councillor; he had heard from charities what the cuts programme would mean for them. He reported that the

council's approach to making cuts to the voluntary sector was going to have a devastating impact on the heroic volunteer army who had supported the borough through this pandemic. More tragically, the cuts would decimate services for the most vulnerable in the borough. Councillor Stranack went on to name some of the potential impacts of the cuts programme; Disability Croydon would have to close; Croydon Carers would close their respite care programme; Croydon Vision staff were facing redundancies; services for the over 65s would be dramatically reduced; Woodside Bereavement Centre would need to close; and Croydon Hearing Resource Centre contracts with the council would end on 31 March 2021.

It was stated that it was clear the Labour Administration cuts programme was going to have the biggest impact on bereaved residents with disabilities and the elderly. It was reported by Councillor Stranack that during the previous week the CVA, in partnership with 20 other leading voluntary organisations in Croydon, had asked the council to pause the cuts programme and instead sit down with the voluntary sector to devise a road map of how they could work together going forward. Councillor Stranack explained an example of this working successfully, and that was his experience in managing a neighbourhood care charity that ran support services for older and vulnerable residents living in Selsdon. Thanks to his team of over 300 volunteers, they were able to provide a multitude of services on an annual budget of £60,000 per annum whilst only needing a council grant of £15,000. He explained that he wrote a paper which demonstrated that if the council or the NHS were to provide similar services, it would cost over a quarter of a million pounds to the taxpayer. They all recognised that the council needed to make financial savings, but he urged members to take up the CVAs offer and for the council to work with the voluntary sector in developing a partnership approach. Councillor Andy Stranack moved the motion.

Councillor Yvette Hopley seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Callton Young questioned when the Opposition began forming their newly discovered concern of the poor and vulnerable. The Administration had always sought to fund Croydon's voluntary and community sector and nurture and encourage its growth. When Labour came into power in 2014, the funding to the voluntary sector was £1.2 million, and under this Administration the figure had risen to £2.7 million. It was reported that after the proposed cuts, the funding would still be £600,000 more than what the Administration inherited.

Councillor Callton Young explained that he became heavily involved in his local voluntary sector 10 years ago through the Croydon African Caribbean Family Organisation and the Thornton Heath Festival. When he became aware of the likely impact to the sector from the financial crisis in Croydon, he did not panic or scaremonger like he felt Opposition Members were, he looked at the sector as resilient and was confident that they would find a way through. The sector had already been addressing the fall-out of national Conservative austerity policy for the past decade. Additionally Councillor

Young stated, Croydon Council should not be the sole source of funding to these organisations and they had written to charities to find solutions going forward. It was noted that there were many other sources of funding which would dwarf any funding that Croydon could offer, such as National Lottery grants, and charities could benefit from support in focussing on professional bid writing to secure those funds. Councillor Callton Young stated that the Opposition should focus energy on supporting the sector going forward and explore ways in which they could secure extra funding. He encouraged Members to vote down the motion.

Councillor Stuart King stated that the opening speech from the Opposition was heavy on condemnation, however light on responsibility. The responsible course of action for the council was to balance the budget. The motion before Council claimed to protect the most vulnerable in the borough by cancelling proposed cuts, not a targeted proposal to exempt individual organisations or groups where a specific concern may exist, but instead a complete blunt cancellation of over a one million pounds of savings and efficiency proposals. Those proposals were designed to minimise the impact on the most vulnerable and represented less than 2% of the entire savings programme, which demonstrated that the Administration had worked hard to ensure that the voluntary sector bared a small share of the savings programme as possible.

Councillor King explained that approving this proposal would undermine the entire carefully prepared recovery plan and the effort to secure the capitalisation direction of £150 million which would allow the council to balance its budget; something the Opposition had always claimed to consider a priority. On this basis, the claim that the Opposition would like to protect the vulnerable remained thin as long as they continued to be selective on who they chose to stand for, whilst presenting no alternatives to the difficult decisions the Administration must take. By law, the council was required to set a balanced budget, therefore, Councillor King suggested, the Opposition must present alternative options on how to achieve the £1 million savings described in the motion. He urged Members to vote against the motion.

Councillor Yvette Hopley stated that the motion highlighted the devastating impacts on vulnerable residents in the borough as a result of the corporate blindness and incompetence of the Labour Administating growing a debt of £1.5 billion through poor decision making. Impacts included the cutting of care packages by 20% and disbanding of services for disabled employment support and reductions to the Welfare Rights team, whose £2 million savings would result in £12 million of losses to the council which was lacking any business case – where no formal consultations were executed ahead of those decisions. It was stated that the voluntary sector would be expected to provide support where the council retreated and were expected to apply for National Lottery funding as a solution. It was noted that the budget must be balanced, however savings should be made in other areas such as selling Brick by Brick and the Colonnades or recovering the £200 million of outstanding loans. Councillor Yvette Hopley supported the motion.

The motion was put to the vote and fell.

7/21

Recommendations of Cabinet or Committees to Council for decision

Education Estates Strategy

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Alisa Flemming to move the recommendation referred from Cabinet on 18 January 2021 relating to the Education Estates Strategy. Councillor Alisa Flemming moved the motion and Councillor Shafi Khan seconded.

Madam Mayor moved the vote and Council unanimously agreed the recommendation in the report.

General Fund Capital Programme 2020-2024

Madam Mayor invited Councillor Stuart King to move the recommendation referred from Cabinet on 18 January 2021 relating to the General Fund Capital Programme 2020-2024. Councillor Stuart King moved the motion and Councillor Callton Young seconded.

Madam Mayor moved the vote and Council agreed the recommendation in the report.

8/21

Exclusion of the Press and Public

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

Signed:

Date:

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