

What is the council doing about getting homeless people off our streets and into accommodation?

The Council provides a wide range of services to prevent, reduce rough sleeping.

In addition to providing a first stage assessment hub, access to 'housing first' and private rented accommodation schemes, we also have a dedicated team to support those sleeping rough. The Council also works closely with organisations such as Thames Reach, who support rough sleepers by encouraging them to take up offers of accommodation and shelter.

Whilst we will always support those who want help to get off the streets, there are instances where a firmer approach is needed if street sleeping is causing anti-social behaviour.

A Safer Streets multi-agency group has been re-established to work with non-engaging rough sleepers causing anti-social behaviour to find a solution that protects both the safety of the individual and the public.

Where appropriate the Council and partners take direct action to prevent and disperse encampments. If enforcement action is necessary, it is undertaken sensitively and as part of a package of measures to support people into accommodation.

In addition the Council is currently developing a new 4-year Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with key partners who have an interest in preventing and tackling homelessness and rough sleeping in Croydon. This will help to coordinate and target support to reduce the number of people sleeping rough on our streets.

In view of the public support and affection for Cherry Orchard Garden Centre, which offers both horticultural therapy and valuable work experience for people with learning difficulties, and a wide range of plants for Croydon's local gardeners and park groups, would the Council be willing to delay the Centre's closure for three months and set up a cross-party committee to look at the future financial viability, (perhaps with more community involvement and support) of such a valuable public resource that would be sorely missed and has now served the Croydon Community for more than thirty years?

As a result of the previous Administration's financial mismanagement, the Council has no choice but to make significant savings in the coming years.

Whilst I know it is an important resource for those who volunteer there, the centre is over 30 years-old and requires significant investment to bring it up to standard. The sad truth is that the Council does not have the money needed for such upgrades and cannot continue to meet the £180,000 a year running costs.

The Council's decision to explore closing the Garden Centre is being fully considered and we truly understand the importance of the service to the 11 local residents and 9 volunteers who use it.

Staff, including dedicated social workers, are exploring similar opportunities available in the community that match the skills of attendees. They will be engaging with those impacted over the coming weeks to explore all pathways.

It remains a priority for me to look at all alternative future options for our residents and Officers are exploring all other opportunities.

I'm personally upset and angry at the impact the previous Administration's mismanagement is having on services and residents. Unfortunately, their legacy of financial mismanagement, historic failures and bad debt will continue to have a long-lasting impact on the borough until we have managed to stabilise the finances of the Council.

The recent census shows that Islamic communities make up 10.6 % of the Borough's population. What can the Executive Mayor promise to do to assist Islamic communities to secure sufficient burial spaces and to help all faiths find places of worship, including my own Croydon Ugandan Islamic community that has to rent a place for prayer outside the Borough?

The Borough has been working for many years to ensure sufficient burial land has been available to all faiths and residents of the Borough that require this option for their funerals. This has been challenging as there is a national shortage of burial space, this is particularly chronic in London and the South East.

Both of the Borough's Victorian cemeteries were close to being full in the early 2000's. Knowing the diversity of the Borough and the cultural need for some communities for burial only the Council began the complex legal process of reclaiming graves to ensure a burial option could still be provided. Without this proactive approach the two Cemeteries would have had to close for new burials. The Council will continue to undertake a rolling programme of reclaiming graves for use at these sites and will do for as long as practical.

In parallel with this the Council has been working for many years to secure planning permission to extend our third cemetery, Greenlawn Memorial Park, in Warlingham and planning permission for Greenlawns has been obtained. Based upon previous usage it is anticipated that this site will have sufficient capacity for approximately 25 years.

Going forward, we intend to use all available legislation to maximise usage of our existing cemetery sites and intend to commence a search for other potential area for future use.

Relating to the second part of your query I understand that finding physical space for worship can be a challenge.

Currently the Council rents out approximately 50 of our buildings to organisations in the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector. Many of these are then home to a whole range of other groups. For example, West Thornton Community Centre is host to 7 separate faith groups as well as chess clubs, lunch clubs etc. The Executive Mayor has asked Officers to have an initial conversation with you about your needs and any potential properties which might be available through this process.

Mr Mayor, In the run up to your election in reference to LTNs, you stated, "I do not want Croydon to be dependent on fining its residents to be able to balance the books but removing that dependency will take some time. I will do it but it won't be on day one!" It is now day 268, you've opened the books and discovered ridiculous and achievable income predictions related to these schemes. There is still no data and no public outreach as was also promised. When will you keep to your word?

The decision to introduce LTN schemes was made by the previous Administration before the Executive Mayor was elected and as the Council's budget is predicated, partially of course, on that decision and he does not feel that he is in a position to reverse it.

In the toxic legacy that was inherited from the previous administration there was also a third tranche of LTN's built into the budget that the Executive Mayor has removed.

Whilst we have not been able to remove the existing LTNs, we have listened and tried to introduce measures to open up access to these roads for local residents and ensure that additional, clearer signage is in place. We have also extended permit exclusions in their localities.

Going forward The Executive Mayor, Cllr Roche, Cabinet Member for Street and Environment have made it very clear to officers, that if we truly believe in Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, if we truly believe that walking and cycling is the way forward and that's the way that we create a more healthy environment, that the way we do that is not by fining our residents. Any future schemes coming forward should not be based on fining residents in order to achieve such outcomes.

Since your election and that of the council, please give examples of any tangible improvements that have taken place to date, outside this building within the Central Croydon Conservation Area. In particular on Katharine Street, High Street, Park Street, and St. George's Walk?

Thank you, Mr Samuel, for your question.

Since the election in May, I am pleased to say a number of projects to improve the High Street are now in progress.

- Bus stops on High Street for services heading southbound will be reopened and new one-way system on Katharine Street and High Street will mean shorter bus routes through the town centre.
- To make it safer and easier to walk and cycle around the area, a new crossing will be added to High Street by Robert Street, and the existing zebra crossing on Katharine Street will be moved to the end of the road, at the corner of The Spread Eagle pub. The temporary cycle lane will be permanent in a revised position on the western side of the highway with more appropriate materials.
- For the part of the High Street that is already pedestrianised, access will be improved by levelling the pavement and removing the gates.

From 17 February, a trial of two way traffic on Fell Road and from Mint walk to the flyover will be implemented, giving better vehicle access for local businesses and residents. This will become two-way for traffic giving access to drivers to turn left into the road from the flyover.

I would like to invite residents, businesses and visitors to the area to provide feedback on these changes through our online survey at croydon.gov.uk/high-street-croydon. The survey will close on 18 August 2023.
