

QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS

Question Number	Question asked by Councillor:	Subject
CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, LEISURE AND SPORT Councillor Timothy Godfrey		
CQ076-17	Pollard, H	Parks Consultation
CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY AND JOBS Councillor Mark Watson		
CQ072-17	Creatura, M	Small Businesses
CABINET MEMBER FOR HOMES, REGENERATION AND PLANNING Councillor Alison Butler		
CQ073-17	Creatura, M	Empty Dwelling Management Orders
CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT Councillor Stuart King		
CQ075-17	Bashford, S	Bonfires

CQ076-17 from Councillor Helen Pollard

Councillor Godfrey

1. Please state the number of people working directly on parks now, and in June 2014. For both dates, please list the job titles and a summary of their responsibilities.
2. Please provide a breakdown of the £100,000 spend on the current parks consultation. How much is being allocated to each consultancy?
3. Please state the date when the findings of the current parks consultation will be published. What format will these findings take?
4. Please confirm how much CIL and s106 money is reserved for spending on parks in Croydon as at 1st July 2017. Please break down this amount and state which parks each piece is earmarked for. Please also state the conditions that must be met in order to release this funding.

Reply

1. Please state the number of people working directly on parks now, and in June 2014. For both dates, please list the job titles and a summary of their responsibilities.

There are two main areas of work within parks within Croydon – the Active Lifestyle Team who are involved with delivering parks masterplanning Croydon, Lets Talks Parks, community small grants, Live Well Croydon, activation projects. The Grounds Maintenance Contract Management who deal with the operational aspects of parks such as grass cutting, horticulture, emptying of bins, locking and unlocking of parks etc.

Current Resource Active Lifestyles

- Active Lifestyle Manager – delivering an integrated service that includes: Ambitious for Parks (outdoor active spaces, parks masterplanning, Croydon Talks Parks, community small grants), Live Well Croydon, activation projects across district centres
- 2x Programme Managers
- 6 x Project Officers responsibilities include Wandle Park Activation, working with Friends groups.

Current Resource, Grounds Maintenance

- 0.33 Contracts manager – Overview of Horticultural Contract responsible for contract performance and overall responsibility for team
- 0.5 Senior contracts Monitoring Officer – Works with the contracts Manager to manage the team
- 3 horticultural Monitors - responsible for monitoring all aspects of horticulture across the borough including Highways and other departments for example Housing, Estates, Schools and education
- 1 Administration Officer – Responsible for co-ordinating contract data and performance information to ensure charges and recharges for the service are prepared and works programmed

2014 Resource Active Lifestyles

- 1 technical manager – maintenance of Infrastructure and development including hard landscape, play and special features
- 3.5 Technical Officers – Maintenance of infrastructure including hard landscape and play

2014 Resource Grounds Maintenance

- 0.33 Contracts manager -- Overview of Horticultural Contract responsible for contract performance and overall responsibility for team
- 1 Green Spaces Co-ordinator (Horticulture Manager) - responsible for monitoring all aspects of horticulture across the borough including Highways and other departments for example Housing, Estates, Schools and education
- 3 Horticultural Monitors - responsible for monitoring all aspects of horticulture across the borough including Highways and other departments for example Housing, Estates, Schools and education
- 1 Administration Officer - Responsible for co-ordinating contract data and performance information to ensure charges and recharges for the service are prepared and works programmed.

2. Please provide a breakdown of the £100,000 spend on the current parks consultation. How much is being allocated to each consultancy?

The funding secured for the masterplanning project is £100,000. The main contract awarded to Tyrens UK is to the value of £76,842.97. An additional £2,317.50 has been agreed to cover an additional engagement exercise at Ashburton Park, venue hire for the Stakeholder events and two ecological surveys

- a) Fees being itemised are £7,496.88 for each of the six masterplans, with other fees covering activities across areas and not broken down by park
- b) Inclusive in Fee: Transport by tube and bike; two high quality printed and bound costs of final reports; USB stick with final reports and drawings; soft copies of all reports, presentations and project outputs in PDF
- c) Other professional consultancy work not inclusive in the Project Scope or Commissioned will be on a time-charged basis as per day and hourly rates provided in the ITT or separate lump sum commission

3. Please state the date when the findings of the current parks consultation will be published. What format will these findings take?

The final masterplans and accompanying reports will be presented to officers in December and final reports will be made available on the Council website [Our Croydon parks vision](#).

4. Please confirm how much CIL and s106 money is reserved for spending on parks in Croydon as at 1st July 2017. Please break down this amount and state which parks each piece is earmarked for. Please also state the conditions that must be met in order to release this funding.

£236k of S106 funding for Active Spaces has been ring-fenced- the wards currently in scope for this project are: New Addington/ Fieldway (Goldcrest Way), King Georges Field, Upper Norwood, Waddon Youth Centre and the fifth site to be confirmed

Through the Council's budget report (February 2017) the borough's CIL is being assigned to

the Council's capital programme and to offset the Council's borrowing. The specific projects on the capital programme to receive CIL funding will be agreed through the IFG, as facilitated by the terms of reference, and in accordance with the relevant legislation.

The assignment of the Local Meaningful Proportion is occurring alongside the borough's CIL, post approval of the Council's February 2017 budget report. The detail of the assignment process is being defined through IFG and following Growth Board approval to the approach in April 2017. The guidance will meet the considerations of the CIL legislation, Community Ward Budgets and Devolution Pilots to frame the bidding and assignment process. In the interim, in July's IFG approved £60,000 of CIL Local Meaningful Proportion will be assigned to Purley, New Addington, Fieldway, Woodside and South Norwood.

Guidance on the assignment of the Local Meaningful Proportion is being drafted on a cross Service basis to be approved at the August IFG following being scoped at the June IFG.

S106 funding as at 1st July 2017 was £1,748,005. We do not earmark this money against any parks specifically until a bid is made at the Infrastructure Finance Group (IFG) meeting. Once a bid is successfully approved at the IFG, the project has to be commenced within twelve months of approval.

CQ074-17

from Councillor Mario Creatura

Councillor Mark Watson

Popular local cafe Piccolino's Snack Bar on St George's Walk has recently announced they will be closing after nine years of trading due to spiraling rental costs. With that in mind, could the Cabinet Member please answer the following questions:

1. In March this year the Cabinet Member publicised the discretionary rates relief scheme by helping MyPT, another business on St George's Walk. Can I ask what other businesses have, to date, received support from this initiative?
2. Given the delays to the Westfield scheme, what does the Cabinet Member feel the impact will be on small businesses outside the development area such as St George's Walk?
3. The owner of Piccolino's has stated that "a lot of shops around here have been taken by the baliffs because they have not been able to pay the rent".
 - a) Does the Cabinet Member agree with this assessment of the situation in St George's Walk?
 - b) It is a situation experienced by other district centres across the borough? If there are reports of struggling businesses, where and what do the Council believe are the reasons for it?
 - c) What is the Cabinet Member's advice for those businesses struggling with high rents and high business rates bills?
4. Mr Piccolino also stated that decreasing footfall due to the closure of the Fairfield Car Park has also contributed to the decline in trading.
 - a) Since 2014, please detail how many car parks have either closed permanently or temporarily in the borough, in particular in the Town Centre.
 - b) What is the average price for a motorist to park in Croydon Town Centre? What is the Administration's plan to bring down these costs to help increase footfall for small businesses?
 - c) Many commuters from the south of the borough had parked in the Town Centre to travel into London, now put off by extortionate fees or lack of availability, causing misery for thousands of our residents. What is the Cabinet Member's advice to those residents about how to mitigate this impact on their day to day life and what will his Administration do to help improve this unacceptable situation?

Reply

1. In March this year the Cabinet Member publicised the discretionary rates relief scheme by helping MyPT, another business on St George's Walk. Can I ask what other businesses have, to date, received support from this initiative?

I am pleased to be able to confirm that to date we have had 7 applications to the scheme of which 6 businesses have been successful. This equates to £76,942.55 of business rate relief, the output of which has been that 73 jobs have been saved and a potential 9 jobs created for the borough.

Working with our Croydon Business Network we continue to promote the scheme and to encourage businesses who need support to get in contact with us.

Last month, Cabinet also agreed the best way to award the additional funding allocated by central government which was announced at the last budget. However, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight my severe concern about the business rates system. The money that has been put forward by national government is not enough to adequately support businesses. In fact, it is our belief that business tax collection in London is clearly disproportionate to the rest of the country and therefore we are calling for a “de-coupled” London valuation system – to prevent the continued disproportionate rates increases for London businesses; as well as calling for full control over mandatory reliefs.

We will continue to work with our business networks and local stakeholders to lobby on behalf of all of our Croydon businesses.

2. Given the delays to the Westfield scheme, what does the Cabinet Member feel the impact will be on small businesses outside the development area such as St George's Walk?

Given the recent pressures that national government have recently imposed upon small businesses, such as the business rates revaluation and auto pension enrolment and following a slowdown in our economic climate possibly due to the instability brought about by Brexit and the recent general election, we as a Council are very aware that now more than ever it is imperative to support the small businesses within our the borough.

This is why I initiated the creation of the Small Business Commission, a business-led commission who have been researching the opportunities and barriers to growth that Croydon SMEs are facing. As a Council we wanted to understand the reality for our Croydon business community. The results of the Commission which are due to be published in September show that the top issues for our businesses are:

- Increased taxes and rising costs
- Access to funding
- Increasing markets (footfall)
- Access to talent

The commission and I have engaged with businesses in St George's Walk in order to ensure that they fed into the report which has also produced an action plan of support which will be delivered with stakeholders to all business within the Borough.

After this consultation we are confident that we understand the pressures facing the businesses located in St Georges Walk and we are working in partnership with Croydon BID and the Croydon Business Network to ensure that good business support provision is available to nurture growth.

3. The owner of Piccolino's has stated that "a lot of shops around here have been taken by the bailiffs because they have not been able to pay the rent".

a) Does the Cabinet Member agree with this assessment of the situation in St George's Walk?

I have also discussed the issues faced by businesses in St George's Walk and I am aware of the challenges that these businesses are facing. The Council are already engaging with the new landowner in order to broker a relationship that benefits all the stakeholders of the area. It is my understanding that already there has been some extensions on leases for a few businesses on St George's Walk which allows the businesses located in the area longer terms to develop and plan for their future, creating stability.

We also have a place making strategy that will increase footfall and provide opportunities for the businesses within St George's Walk. We are currently looking to create a pedestrianised area for the High Street between Park Street and Katharine Street. The aim of the project is to extend the growth of footfall from North End outwards providing opportunities for St George's Walk businesses (which would also include trading opportunities) extending the reach of their businesses and creating an exciting new café culture.

b) It is a situation experienced by other district centres across the borough? If there are reports of struggling businesses, where and what do the Council believe are the reasons for it?

As highlighted in my previous answers and following on from the evidence produced by the work of the Small Business Commission we believe that there are many contributors to the current economic climate. Increased business rates and rising costs directly attributable to increased inflation as well as the uncertainty brought about by Brexit and the recent general election are some of these.

Our business community have shown that they are resilient and innovative and whilst there are direct pressures on them, evidence is also showing that many of our SME community see Croydon as a borough of opportunity offering businesses that chance to be located in a London borough at a fifth of the London costs. It is important that Croydon businesses face differing pressures depending on size, sector etc.

c) What is the Cabinet Member's advice for those businesses struggling with high rents and high business rates bills?

Whilst the Council cannot control the property market we can and do offer support and signposting to our business community. Businesses are welcome to view business support initiatives online at <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/business/support> or alternatively we encourage our businesses to talk to our Economic Growth business support team who would be delighted to assist any business located within the borough.

There are many excellent support services that look to help businesses and we are delighted to work closely with them to support our business community. Croydon has very active BIDs and a strong Croydon Business Network – *(the Croydon Business Network are the business support networks that work together to provide advice, guidance and funding opportunities to Croydon businesses).*

Our own Council offering includes:

- Discretionary business rates relief
- Croydon Enterprise Loan Fund (provides access to finance for local businesses)
- Croydon Urban Edge - our Inward Investment team that provide a free dedicated premises and property business support service to help businesses start up, relocate or expand in Croydon.
- Croydon Works – a free job brokerage designed to support our businesses to find the right local talent to drive their business forward

4. Mr Piccolino also stated that decreasing footfall due to the closure of the Fairfield Car Park has also contributed to the decline in trading.

a) Since 2014, please detail how many car parks have either closed permanently or temporarily in the borough, in particular in the Town Centre.

We are aware of one car park that has temporarily closed in the town centre – this is Fairfield Hall car park. This car park will be reopening after the development of the Fairfield Halls which is due to be completed by approx. 2018.

b) What is the average price for a motorist to park in Croydon Town Centre? What is the Administration's plan to bring down these costs to help increase footfall for small businesses?

The cost of parking varies on street and in car parks. On street the charges are £2.40 for 1 hour's parking. In our council-managed car parks near the town centre it costs from £1.20-£1.70 for 1 hour's parking.

All of our tariffs for our council managed car parks are available on our website at <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/transportandstreets/parking/car-parks/carparks2>

Last year we reviewed all of our parking charges across the borough and have simplified the tariffs and as a result some tariffs decreased and some increased. We have also just introduced 1- hour free parking in all of our district centres.

There are several other private car park operators in the town centre such as NCP, Q-Park & Centrale. Q-Park offers a day rate of £11.00 to park in the town centre with season ticket price starting at £403.00, NCP Croydon Central and NCP Croydon Whitgift have day rates of £13.00. They all offer differing car park tariffs and the latest tariff information can be found on their websites.

c) Many commuters from the south of the borough had parked in the Town Centre to travel into London, now put off by extortionate fees or lack of availability, causing misery for thousands of our residents. What is the Cabinet Member's advice to those

residents about how to mitigate this impact on their day to day life and what will his Administration do to help improve this unacceptable situation?

Whilst I understand the pressures that commuters face, as a council we have had to look very carefully at our strategy to reduce congestion, ensure that visitors to our town centre economy can also visit, shop and spend leisure time in the town centre and look carefully at how best to control air pollution.

Beyond London, many cities have Park-and-Ride schemes to reduce congestion and to protect their city centre environment. We believe we should not be encouraging or facilitating anyone to drive into the Croydon Town Centre to use it for Park-and-Ride for journeys into central London. My advice to residents is to walk, cycle or get the bus to their nearest station. Working together will be key when looking at tackling important issues such as congestion and air quality and other wider impacts that affect the wider Croydon community.

CQ073-17 from Councillor Mario Creatura

Councillor Alison Butler

In 2006, the Government introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs) giving the power to Council's to possess empty properties.

In April this year the Department for Communities and Local Government stated that there are 1,216 empty properties in Croydon.

A report by James Pendleton estate agents published on 19th July this year reveals that the only boroughs to have made applications in the last year were Lewisham, Bromley, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea, Hammersmith and Fulham, Havering and Barking and Dagenham.

Could I please find out:

1. Is the DCLG figure accurate?
2. Is the report correct that Croydon has not used the EDMO powers given to it by the Government? If the Council has not, why not?
3. How many empty properties has the Council brought back into use since the new administration took over in May 2014?
4. What is the Council doing to bring empty properties back into use?

Reply

1. The Council reported a figure of 1,216 long term empty properties in the Council Tax Base report in October 2016. This includes all dwellings that were classed as empty on 3 October 2016 and had been for more than 6 months.

2. The report is correct in that the vast majority of local authorities, including Croydon, have not used the EDMO powers. Croydon's empty property service has been very successful in bringing empties back into use, using enforcement action, advice and persuasion, grants, loans and ultimately Compulsory Purchase (CPO) action. Although the introduction of an EDMO scheme has been considered, the legislation is considered cumbersome and resource intensive compared to other successful options and could present a risk to the council. Unlike Compulsory Purchase orders and Enforced Sale, EDMOs do not involve an enforceable change of ownership. Any local authority wishing to use an EDMO must apply to a Residential Property Tribunal and if successful, this initially lasts for twelve months. During this time the local authority and the owner are expected to work together to bring the property back into use. If no agreement is reached, the local authority may make a final EDMO which then lasts for a further six years. The cost of any remedial works to the property to make it habitable is initially met by the Local Authority and recovered from rental income over the seven year total life of an EDMO. This exposes the local authority to considerable financial risk if the refurbishment costs cannot be recovered. As an EDMO is considered an 'enforcement' process it is only used as an option of last resort when other negotiation options have been exhausted. Figures show that since the policy was introduced only 108

properties have been the subject of EDMOs nationally. This suggests that, although well intentioned, the legislation is not a popular choice among more than 300 local authorities for bringing empty properties back into use.

3. Since May 2014, the council has brought back into use the following numbers of empty properties:

- 2014/15 – 97 (against target of 75)
- 2015/16 – 137 properties (against new target of 100 with two EPO's)
- 2016/17 – 103 properties (against target of 100 with one EPO)
- 2017/18 – 25 properties (to date with one EPO)

4. The council operates an Empty Property Service to which residents can report empty homes via the councils' website or via the telephone hotline. Reports are investigated and if a property is found to be vacant, contact is made with the owner where possible. Advice and assistance, which may be in the form of a grant, is given to assist the owner with returning the property to use. Where a grant is given, the council secures nomination rights for tenants for a five year period, thereby assisting with the homelessness crisis. For owner occupiers and owners that do not wish to become landlords, Croydon has a locally funded Empty Property Loan scheme. This low interest loan is made available to owners to assist with the cost of bringing a home up to habitable standard and this loan is secured by way of a full legal charge on the property.

For non-cooperative or untraceable owners the local authority has other enforcement powers, such as Compulsory Purchase. A Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO), if approved by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, results in the property being taken away from the owner. It is then sold on the open market with a condition stating that it must be refurbished and occupied within twelve months. We have a proven track record of using Compulsory Purchase Orders to tackle long-term empty properties.

The empty property service is currently working with 747 long term vacant properties (vacant for 6 months or more) to bring them back into use. The current schemes of 'encouragement' by grant and loan, coupled with the publicised possibility and use of other established enforcement options (CPO and Improvement Notices), result in approximately 100 homes being successfully returned to use each year and are therefore a more productive use of the resource available.

Approval has been given to recruit a second empty property officer to further extend this valuable work.

CQ075-17 from Councillor Sara Bashford

Councillor Stuart King

Further to this comment in the response to CQ070-17 -
"The Council receives and deals with around 1,500 complaints about bonfires each year and can take enforcement action if the smoke causes a statutory nuisance. There are currently no time restrictions on when people can have bonfires." can you please let me know how many of these complaints resulted in enforcement action being taken. If any action has been taken has it been by way of a penalty notice or has any resulted in court action.

Reply

In 2016 the pollution team received 443 complaints about bonfires, with 114 Informal notices (advice letters) and 38 Statutory notices served under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

In 2017 to current the pollution team have received 278 complaints about bonfires, with 56 Informal notices (advice letters) and 45 Statutory notices served under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

There have been no cases where court action has been take during 2016 or 2017.