

Council

Meeting held on Monday, 30 November 2020 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, Janet Campbell, 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, 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 Toni Letts

PART A

135/20 **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 September 2020, 12 October 2020 and 22 October 2020 were agreed as an accurate record.

136/20 **Disclosure of Interests**

There were none.

137/20 **Urgent Business (if any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

138/20 **Announcements**

Madam Mayor

Madam Mayor gave her announcements to the Members of Council.

All the schools taking part in Croydon Connected were thanked for their participation. The paperchain entries were beginning to be received and

would be displayed during the following days in the Town Hall. It was recognised that with the Town Hall being shut due to the pandemic this would limit the number of people who would be able to view the entries, however they would all be linked together and would stretch the length of the Town Hall.

Members were informed that the planned Travelling Grotto which was to visit Croydon's children was no longer able to take place due to covid-19. Madam Mayor advised Council that she had arranged for presents to be purchased for each child who would have been visited and a recorded video with Father Christmas would be shown when the present was delivered.

Madam Mayor congratulated three children from Winterbourne School who had won the Mayor's annual Christmas card competition. It was noted that there was a wealth of talent in Croydon, particularly in the children and young people of the borough.

Madam Mayor's announcements were concluded by wishing Tom Downs, from Democratic Services, the best of luck in the future as he was sadly leaving the Council having. Tom Downs had been a member of the Democratic Services team since April 2018 and prior to that had been a member of the Town Hall Concierge Team.

The Leader

Madam Mayor invited the Leader, Councillor Hamida Ali, to make her announcements.

The Leader reported that the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's (MHCLG) non-statutory rapid review had almost concluded. The review had been tasked with providing assurance to the Secretary of State for Housing Communities & Local Government on range of matters including the council's request for a Capitalisation Direction.

The Leader stated that she expected the work of the review team, which had taken four weeks to be completed, to be reported to the Secretary of State in due course.

The Leader was conscious that a number of officers and Members had been involved in the review. The Leader was confident that the new leadership team and management team had demonstrated their understanding of the situation facing the council and the improvement required. It was reported, in informal meetings with the lead reviewer that the review team had found the council had been forthcoming.

The Leader thanked officers for their hard work in facilitating the review team's work and stated that she looked forward to receiving their report in due course.

139/20 **The Croydon Debate**

Ahead of the substantive items of the agenda Madam Mayor advised Council that in accordance with Paragraphs 1.2 and 3.5 of Part 4A of the Constitution she would vary the order of the agenda to consider item 11 (Recommendations of Cabinet to Council) following Croydon Question Time. As such, the order items were considered at the meeting was as follows:

- Item 6 – The Croydon Debate
- Item 7 – Croydon Question Time
- Item 11 – Recommendations of Cabinet to Council for Decision
- Item 8 – Member Petitions
- Item 9 – Annual Reports

Council were advised that with the agreement of the Group Whips the time allowed for the three pools of questions to Cabinet Members had been reduced to 20 minutes each. Madam Mayor thanked the Whips for all their work in reaching cross party agreement on the process to be taken at the meeting to allow for additional time to be given to the debate on the Croydon Renewal Plan and Strategic Review of Companies.

Madam Mayor noted that the petition to be discussed had been validated and in accordance with the provisions in Part 4A of the Constitution and invited the Council Solicitor to read the borough petition which read:

"I support the Purley and Woodcote and Purley Oaks and Riddlesdown councillors' campaign to save Purley Pool and Leisure Centre and call on Croydon Council to save them from closure."

Ms Theresa Paul, as the lead petitioner, was invited by Madam Mayor to address Council on the petition.

Ms Theresa Paul stated Purley Pool was close to her heart, having used the pool since she had been born and having taught a number of children to learn to swim there. Concerns were raised that without a pool in Purley there would be a large impact on people's access to local pool facilities, including schools which had a statutory responsibility to teach pupils to swim 25 metres unaided. This, it was noted, was an important lifesaving skill and the pool in Purley enabled schools in the south of the borough to provide this training.

Council were informed that the average school's journey time to Purley pool 32 minutes each way on public transport. If schools were required to use the pool at Waddon leisure centre the journey time would increase to, an average, 52 minutes each way. The increased journey time, it was stated, would be at the cost of another area of the curriculum. Furthermore, private pools in the area were not 25 metres and were more expensive to hire.

Ms Paul stressed that she would like all residents to have equal access to a local pool and the closure of Purley pool would impact not just schools, but all local residents who used the pool.

It was noted, that Swim England had issued research which showed that swimming was ideal for those who could not exercise on firm ground and improved a person's ability to concentrate and supported the management of long term conditions such as ADHD, obesity and dementia.

Furthermore, it was stated that research had shown that swimming had been proven to reduce the symptoms of anxiety or depression for 1.4 million adults in Britain and that over half a million adults with mental health conditions, who swam, said they had a reduced number of visits to health professionals due to swimming.

Ms Paul concluded that she, like many others, were keen for swimming facilities to be available now and in the future as a key element in the education of children and as a much needed facility for many adults.

The **Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration**, Councillor Lewis, thanked Ms Paul and all the residents who had signed the petition and stressed that their commitment to the local community and local facilities was commendable.

Council were advised that Croydon had been through ten years of austerity, underfunding with the council receiving £200 less per person than Lambeth and there had also been the unprecedented impact of covid-19. These factors, it was stated, had a huge impact on the council's financial position and a Section 114 Notice had been issued. It was necessary for the council to make extremely tough decisions to dramatically reduce the council's expenditure. Furthermore, the leisure partner, GLL, had additionally been impacted financially by the pandemic.

The Cabinet Member stated that considering the above financial position the council was having to consider the sustainability of the leisure contract as a whole, rather than on a site specific basis. It was noted that across the contract some facilities created a surplus and others required subsidies to operate. Initially, at the beginning of 2020 loss making facilities could be subsidised by those which made profits, such as Purley leisure centre which had required a subsidy of £180,000 per annum, however the impact of covid-19 meant the Cabinet Member was unable to provide assurances as to the future of Purley leisure centre. The contract as a whole was being reviewed and the council had been applying for funding and support were possible. Facilities would operate in a more limited way to reduce costs and some potentially, it was stated by the Cabinet Member, may need to close. Purley leisure centre was one such facility which was being considered.

The Cabinet Member recognised that residents would need to change routines to access facilities and it may present some challenges but the Administration was required to make decisions in the best interest of the financial sustainability of the council. The Cabinet Member concluded that the council may consider community models of operation which were cost neutral to the council and felt that it was important that all involved looked to the

future and started the conversation with residents about the future ambition of having a new facility in the south of the borough.

Councillor Quadir noted that whilst other pools in the borough had reopened following the first lockdown during the pandemic, Purley pool had not. This was questioned as Councillor Quadir stated that in his opinion the pool structure was sound and the facility was very popular.

It was noted that thousands of residents had signed the petition and that it was important that the council listened to residents. The elderly and vulnerable used the pool and it was an integral facility for school children to learn lifesaving skills. Additionally, many residents used the pool to keep fit and healthy and it was stated by Councillor Quadir that, now more than ever, it was vital to keep fit and as such it was, in his opinion, as disgrace that a much loved and utilised facility would be considered for closure.

Councillor Quadir questioned why the health and happiness of Purley residents mattered less than the residents of Waddon or New Addington. Furthermore, Councillor Quadir stressed that closing the pool was not only against the wishes of local people but it was also against the council's duty to protect the services residents rely upon.

It was stated by Councillor Quadir that the Labour Administration was proposing to shut libraries, recycling centres, reduce the number of social workers, streets cleaners and close Purley pool due to financial strategies which had seen the council's debt rise to £1.5 billion.

Councillor Quadir concluded by asking whether the Administration would work with Conservative councillors and the community to save Purley pool or whether it would close the facility and sell it to developers.

Councillor Flynn commended the supported of the petition and stressed that she sympathised with their desire to protect a much loved facility. Councillor Flynn explained that there were four pools open at the time of the meeting in the borough, (Thornton Heath, New Addington, South Norwood and Waddon). Croydon's comparator borough, Ealing, also had four pools open.

Councillor Flynn referenced the Cabinet Member's response to the petition that prior to the pandemic GLL, who ran the leisure contract in Croydon, was turning a profit in other facilities in the borough. This had enabled Purley pool to be subsidised. For the majority of the year GLL had not been fully functional with restrictions in place requiring full or partial closure of facilities. Whilst the council had worked to support GLL during this period Purley pool had consistently ran at a loss of £180,000 per year.

It was noted by Councillor Flynn that due to site restrictions it was not possible to redevelop the leisure or enlarge the gym facilities, which would support subsidising the running of the pool. It was further noted that the facility required considerable investment. The air handling system and balance tanks

required replacement at a cost of £200,000; which could not be covered by the council or GLL.

Councillor Flynn concluded by acknowledging the work of Members and residents to present the petition and their clear concerns for the local community. Whilst it would be sad to lose the facility, Councillor Flynn stated there was a high quality facility at Waddon leisure centre which was 16 minute journey on the 289 bus which was popular with residents and school children.

It was stated by **Councillor Redfern** that Purley town centre served as a hub for the south of the borough and served around a quarter of the borough's population. The statutory duty of schools to ensure all 11 year olds can swim 25 metres unaided and the role of community swimming pools to facilitate meeting that requirement was highlighted by Councillor Redfern. By closing down the pool, which was used by at least ten schools, would restrict opportunities to ensure the safety of children.

Councillor Redfern further noted the need for all to remain fit and healthy and the location of Purley pool gave residents in the area, who were unable to do alternative exercise, an opportunity to remain fit. It was noted the Enterprise Swimming Club had provided swimming activities for the disabled at Purley pool since 1982. Concerns were raised that those who had previously taken part in the clubs activities had been without exercise for over nine months and the council, had not discussed alternative venues with the club. Furthermore, Councillor Redfern stated the pool in Purley brought people to the district centre and its closure would have an impact on the local economy.

Concerns were raised that for residents of Sanderstead, Kenley or Coulsdon a round trip to Waddon or New Addington would require taking two or three buses. This could take up to two and a half hours, which would not be practical for primary schools. It was stressed the council should be making exercise easier and not harder.

Councillor Redfern stated Purley leisure centre had been underfunded and investment in the centre had not taken place during the previous six years and the council had not sought to access alternative funding streams, such as £250m released by Sports England earlier that year.

In response to the suggestion by the Cabinet Member that the community should look to the future of a swimming pool in the south of the borough, Councillor Redfern stated that until there was planning permission and ring fenced funding for such a project the people of Purley would not understand the closure of the current facility. Councillor Redfern concluded by reminding Council that in January 2015 it had unanimously voted to keep Purley pool open and appealed to Members that they should not renege on that decision.

Madam Mayor invited Ms Colette Luke to speak as one of the lead petitioners.

Ms Colette Luke informed Council that she was representing the children of St Aidan's who had passionately organised the 'Walk to Save Purley Pool' campaign which had been inspired by their role models; Captain Tom Moore and Marcus Rashford. Quotes were read out by Ms Luke from the children who had been involved in the campaign:

Jeremy: "Swimming is the only sport that saves lives. I need to practice at Purley pool. One day, I might be in a situation where I need to save my life or someone else's, keep Purley pool open. It's a matter of life or death."

Tye: "With COVID, lots of mums and dads have lost their jobs. We don't have money now. This summer, we'll have nothing to look forward to. At least if we have Purley pool, we can still have some fun with our friends."

Abigail: "I watched the news. And I saw that some adults at Croydon Council have made bad decisions about money. That's their fault. And it's not fair that Purley pool is shut and all the children should suffer."

Natalie: "Before lockdown, we used to go every Thursday with our teachers for our swimming at Purley pool. We shared our pool time with a group of disabled people. They used to see us and always smiled and waved at us. I'm so sad that I can't go swimming anymore, but I feel even sadder for them."

Robin: "I live in a flat. There are lots of flats in Coulsdon and Purley. Getting exercise at Purley pool is even more important when people don't have a garden."

Isadora: "My mum told me a very sad story. There was a girl and a boy and their dad and they all drowned in a swimming pool last year when they were on holiday in Spain. That family were from London like us, I think if Purley pool closes forever and the children can't practice their swimming anymore, I feel really scared that that could happen to someone I know around here."

Ms Luke, informed Members that while the children were planning their campaign they had asked whether Purley pool had been open when she had been a child. She had explained that it had opened when she was their age and how excited she had been to have somewhere local to swim and meet friends. Ms Luke, reflected that she felt sad that if all present at the meeting were champions for the children of Croydon then it was important to ensure children had the same, if not better, provision as they had enjoyed growing up.

Madam Mayor invited the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration to respond to the matters raised during the debate.

The **Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration** expressed that it had been good to meet with some of the 'Save Purley Pool' campaigners, the previous evening, and welcomed the discussion at the Council meeting. Whilst the Cabinet Member stated he had heard the concerns of the

petitioners he noted that the council were in a position where it could no longer subsidise the facility.

The Cabinet Member committed to continue dialogue with the petitioners and thanked them for raising the voices of the pupils of St Aidans and offered to visit the school and speak with the children.

Madam Mayor asked the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration to summarise the Administration's next steps on the matter.

In addition to continuing the conversation with residents in the south of the borough and potentially visiting St Aidan's to meet the children who had been part of the campaign, the **Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration** restated his commitment to working with the community in Purley to investigate potential alternative models for operating the leisure centre. This would be cost neutral to the council and discuss the potential for new facilities in the south of the borough.

Madam Mayor informed Council that in accordance with Paragraph 3.18.5, subsection 8 of Part 4A of the Constitution that the debate was brought to a close and that there was no vote on the item. The petitioners were thanked for their participation in the meeting.

140/20 **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 till 12 noon on Friday 27 November 2020. Twelve questions had been submitted. Madam Mayor advised that a number of questions related to the Low Traffic Network and unfortunately those could not be taken as the Council's Constitution specifically prohibited questions pertaining to ongoing litigation. Those residents which had submitted questions relating to the Low Traffic Network had been written to and advised of the situation.

Madam Mayor read a question from Maria Nawrocka:

"The Croydon Renewal Plan paper to Council on 28 September estimated in-year staff savings of £2m. How many council staff have lost their livelihoods as a result of:

- *Voluntary redundancy; and*
- *Compulsory redundancy.*

What is the current in-year (2020-21) savings projection as a result of staff redundancies?

How many staff continue to be paid by the council through agency or consultancy contracts?

What is the in-year (2020-21) cost of agency and consultancy staff?"

In his response the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal, Councillor King, thanked Maria Nawrocka for her instrumental work on the award winning work on the Croydon Play Streets scheme. Council were informed that 94 staff were leaving the council as a result of redundancy during 2020/21. 48 of those staff members were leaving under a voluntary arrangement and the remaining 46 were under a compulsory arrangement which would result in savings in the region of £1,386,000. Councillor King stated that figure excluded vacancy deletions and redeployment costs. In response to the final part of the question, Councillor King stated there were 267 staff employed on an agency contract basis and the in-year expenditure for those positions was in the region of £13,840,000.

Madam Mayor read a question from Kostandinos Dexiades to the meeting:

"When I emailed Councillor Ali to ask what is the Labour Council doing about stopping fly tipping in Croydon, I got email back from Councillor Ali to report fly tipping on My Account. I do this, but that's not the issue. My question was what is Labour doing to stop fly tipping? Councillor Ali responded it is not Labour that is fly tipping – that is not the way to email Croydon voters. So, what is Labour doing to stop fly tipping in Croydon, so that taxpayers don't pay to clear up after fly-tippers?"

In his response the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, Councillor Muhammad Ali, stated fly tipping was a national crisis and was costing local government, as a whole, significant sums of money to tackle. It was noted that the former Cabinet Member for Clean Green Croydon had lobbied the Secretary of State for DEFRA. The response from DEFRA had not addressed how the issue would be tackled nationally.

Councillor Ali stated that since 2014 the Council had operated the 'Don't Mess with Croydon' campaign and an app had been developed to enable residents to report a number of environmental issues, such as fly tipping. Furthermore, the Council employed Enforcement Officers who had issued around 800 and 1000 fixed penalty notices annually and the council had seized 53 vehicles which had been used to fly tip.

In conclusion, Councillor Ali explained, Croydon could not combat fly tipping alone and required the support of residents to continue to report those who fly tipped. Government intervention was also required. Councillor Ali requested that environmental issues were reported through the correct channels to support the council in monitoring the performance of the contractor.

Madam Mayor read a question from Mark Samuels to the meeting:

“Croydon will live within its means”, says replacement Leader of the Council. Councillor Hamida Ali, continues to declare publicly funded employment as, “workforce equality, diversity, and inclusion manager” at the Greater London Authority. Given our parlous state, surely any committed leader would instead, focus solely on the improvement of Croydon?”

In her response the Leader of the Council, Councillor Hamida Ali stressed that she had served in her role as Leader full time since she was appointed. From 16 October 2020 and 10 November 2020 she had been on a combination of annual leave and public duties leave. Since that date she had been on an unpaid sabbatical from her role at the Greater London Authority, which had enabled her to focus full time on being the Leader of the Council.

Madam Mayor read a question from Ola Kolade to the meeting:

“With an increase in complex cases relating to vulnerable young people in Croydon. How does this administration plan to support their wellbeing, given plans to make £6.4 million in cuts to this department?”

In her response the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning, Councillor Flemming, stated the council continued to work with its young people and had been able to support a number to enter apprenticeships. Work would continue with partner agencies to support young people and going forward conversations would continue with the upcoming university providers; Southbank University, Roehampton University and Croydon College to further support young people in the borough. In particular, the Cabinet Member highlighted targeted opportunities, such as short courses and longer courses to support young people to enter the workplace.

Furthermore, Councillor Flemming highlighted the work of CALAT (Croydon Adult Learning & Training) which undertook targeted work with 16 to 18 year olds to support them, whether academically if they had missed qualifications or to enter the workplace.

Madam Mayor read a question from Richard Mearns to the meeting:

“Croydon have a proven track record with wasting money and mismanagement of public funds. Can Cllr Ali or his predecessor

- 1. Provide a clear explanation of the costs of the implementation of the Road Blocks across Croydon?*
- 2. How much does each planter cost?*
- 3. How much have the concrete road closure cost to put in?”*

In his response the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, Councillor Muhammad Ali, stated he was confident that the cost of the measures was similar to the costs incurred by other local authorities in London which had implemented similar measures otherwise Transport for London (TfL) would not have approved proposal or funding.

It was explained that the average cost of the measures was just over £1,000 per unit and that TfL normally pays most of the funds which a local authority uses to invest in the public realm and transport of the borough. In 2020/21, with the pandemic, funding was put in place to implement TfL's Street Space Programme and the Croydon Street Space Programme, which sought to create temporary low traffic streets and neighbourhoods.

Madam Mayor read a second question from Kostandinos Dexiades to the meeting:

"My question, why did the Labour Council allow this bankruptcy to happen after being warned this would happen?"

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance, Councillor Young, noted that the Report in the Public Interest (RIPI) stated that there had been opportunities in recent years where the Council could and should have taken action to mitigate the financial pressures.

The Cabinet Member stated that the report did not suggest there had been deliberate action on the part of the council which had led to the 2020/21 in-year pressures exceeding the council's reserves position. Rather, the Cabinet Member noted, the report cited missed opportunities, such as the auditor concerns which had been reported to officers and Members in July 2018 and the adverse Value for Money qualification reported in 2019. The conclusion of the report had been that there had been collective corporate blindness and opportunities to rectify the financial position and this, the Cabinet Member stated, was a matter of regret

The Cabinet Member noted that there were further reviews due to be completed and that those alongside the RIPI would enable the council to better understand how it had reached the position of issuing a Section 114 Notice. The Cabinet Member concluded that the Croydon Renewal Plan, Financial Recovery Plan, the RIPI Action Plan, the submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and the Independent Improvement Board would all support the council on the road to recovery.

Questions to the Leader

In his question the Leader of the Opposition, **Councillor Perry**, stated Croydon was due to face the most draconian cuts the borough had seen but queried the Leader's remarks to residents that they were "not to worry". Councillor Perry questioned why the Leader maintained this line when all residents would be affected, and in particular the most vulnerable.

The Leader noted that given the issuing of a Section 114 Notice it would be understandable for residents and community organisations to be concerned, especially with the term 'bankrupt' being used. However, the Leader felt it was important that the council reassured residents that, despite the difficult financial situation, the council would continue to be there to support residents.

The Leader confirmed that statutory services would continue and it was non-statutory and new expenditure which were the subject of the Section 114 Notice. Services such as refuse collection, services to protect children and vulnerable adults which were statutory would continue to be delivered. The council was required, given the financial situation, to review services and find savings as the financial resilience of the authority needed to be addressed. The Leader concluded that it was important that the council continued to support residents even in the context of delivering necessary savings.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Perry stated he felt the Leader was giving residents false hope as services would be diminished to combat the financial position the council was in. He queried whether the Leader would show true leadership and expel and seek the resignation of Councillors Newman, Butler and Hall from the Labour Group as Councillor Perry stated residents, staff and partners were angry and wanted to see action.

In her response, the Leader responded by saying that she felt that it was really important to reassure residents, especially in light of some of the messages from Opposition group to the alternative. The council had a controllable budget of almost £300million which provided a range of services and the Leader stressed those services would continue to be delivered. The challenge, the Leader stressed was to live within the financial envelope available and it was recognised that all areas of the council would need to be reviewed to achieve that. Budget proposals had been agreed by Cabinet at the meeting the previous week and a consultation would take place with residents in order to hear their ideas also.

The Leader noted that the external auditor, Grant Thornton, at the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 19 November 2020 had recognised that there had been demonstrable change at the council in the proceeding weeks in response to the concerns they had raised. In terms of Councillor Perry's supplementary question, the Leader reiterated that those councillors were no longer in their previous roles due to resignation or changes in the Cabinet.

Councillor Woodley queried what the likely impact to Croydon would be of being placed into tier two as a consequence of the covid-19 pandemic.

The Leader stressed that the national restrictions in place and that the 'Stay at Home' message was still in place. From 2 December 2020 the whole of London would be placed in tier 2, High Alert. In terms of local businesses; non-essential shops, gyms, hospitality and entertainment facilities would be able to reopen under tier 2. It was imperative that the message of 'Hands, Face, Space' should still be in place to stop the spread of the virus and avoid a move into tier 3. The Leader noted that Croydon had been fortunate to have comparatively low infection rates for London. Whilst this was the case the Leader stressed it was important that London as a whole had the same rules in place.

The Chair of Croydon Health Services, Mike Bell, had addressed Cabinet earlier that day and the Leader reiterated his message that the NHS was open; whether to access GP services or emergency care.

Councillor Hollands queried whether the Leader accepted that her Administration was no longer in control of the borough due to financial mismanagement and asked how she expected residents to trust Labour with the council's finances.

The Leader stated that she did not accept the suggestion that the Administration was not in control of the borough. The Leader recognised that they were within straitened financial times and were within emergency measures due to the Section 114 Notice but stressed the council had a controllable budget of £300million annually which delivered vital services.

The Leader reiterated that the configuration of services would need to be looked at, including how much was being spent on the delivery of the service and whether that was comparable to other local authorities and whether Croydon was in line with best practice. This was what the Administration was resolutely focused on, as stated by the Leader, along with the improvement journey as it was noted the financial position had not emerged overnight. It was stressed by the Leader that it was important the council continued to deliver services for residents.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Hollands stated that Labour had been first elected as the administration in Croydon in 1994 and following that period, in 2003, there had been a 27% council tax increase which he stated was to offset the financial consequences of the time. Such an increase in council tax was not possible, and so Councillor Hollands queried whether critical services would be lost on this occasion.

The Leader noted there were caps on how much revenue councils could generate from residents and that the Comprehensive Spending Review released the proceeding week had shown that the government assumed councils would increase council tax by around 4.5-5%, including the Adult Social Care precept. As such, the Leader felt it was clear the government would expect residents to provide additional funding for local government.

Councillor Clark queried whether the figure of 400 redundancies at the council in 2020 was correct.

The Leader confirmed that while 400 posts had been put at risk of redundancy during the staffing review fewer than 100 members of staff had left or were due to leave the organisation. This was due to the removal of vacant posts and whilst that presented challenges in terms of capacity in the organisation it had reduced the impact on the number staff leaving the council.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Clark noted the council's budget was under severe pressure and painful decisions would be required. In light of these factors, Councillor Clark requested the Leader commit to early and

meaningful engagement with trade unions with a view to minimise the impact on staff and services.

The Leader confirmed, in her response, that the council was working with the trade unions at an early stage. The Deputy Leader (Councillor King) and herself had met with Unison the previous week. The Leader stated, she would want to minimise the number of compulsory redundancies but that proper consultation and constructive discussion would need to take place before decisions were made.

Pool 1

With the end of the time allocated for questions to the Leader, Madam Mayor moved to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool. Councillor Avis, Councillor Wood and Councillor Shahul-Hameed were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed, Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery & Skills, informed Council that Croydon had been awarded just over £14million in business grants from government of which £8.2million was discretionary grants and the remaining £5.8million had been local restriction support grants for businesses closed from 5 November 2020 due to the restrictions that had been put in place.

Council were advised that the mandatory grant payments were being distributed and 1015 businesses had been identified and sent the application form to complete for grants. Once a completed form had been received the grants were processed. In terms of the discretionary grants, the council's website had been updated and the application process would be opened that week.

In her question to Councillor Avis, **Councillor Hale** noted the Cabinet Member for Homes & Gateway Services had been a strong supporter of labour policies over the previous six years and had, in her opinion, shut down Opposition members who had raised concerns. In light of cuts to the Housing and Gateway services, Councillor Hale questioned whether Councillor Avis regretted her previous decisions.

In her response, Councillor Avis stated she did not regret any of her decisions or comments to Opposition Members. Whilst she was proud of a number of initiatives the Administration had put in place she was ashamed of the financial position of the council which would impact vulnerable residents. Councillor Avis reiterated the council would be there to support them but recognised the discretionary services may no longer be delivered.

Councillor Hale raised concerns, in her supplementary question that during a period when an increasing number of residents were approaching the Gateway Service that services would be cut. Councillor Hale noted that staff had worked to help people as early as possible to keep their home, stay safe and manage their debts but the council had little choice but to cut those

services. In particular, the Welfare Rights Service was highlighted as demand for that service had increased by 300% in the last year.

Councillor Avis also recognised, in her response, the work of the Gateway Service but noted that the service had been introduced due to the impact of Universal Credit to ensure families were not adversely affected. Councillor Avis stated the intention was to take the ethos of Gateway and embed it in the council as a whole.

In her question **Councillor Prince** asked whether the Cabinet Member for Economic Recovery & Skills shared her concern that the government had let down businesses by not extending rate relief for retail, leisure and hospitality businesses into 2021/22.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed in her response stated the government had let a number of people down and that its decisions had a huge impact on the business community. The night-time economy, was at breaking point and the feedback from businesses was that the grants were not enough to support them during this period. The Cabinet Member stated there was a need for targeted emergency support and noted the decision to not extend the rate relief scheme would have a major impact on those businesses, including possible closures and job losses.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Prince stated she was pleased that lobbying of government was taking place and queried whether there had been any indication that the government may u-turn on the decision to not extend the rate relief.

Councillor Shahul-Hameed stated in her response that a u-turn was hoped for. The campaign by Croydon BID, which was started during the first lockdown and sought to support businesses over £51,000 was highlighted as it was noted that the government had since announced support for those businesses. The Cabinet Member confirmed that the council would continue to support lobbying for further support for the business community.

Councillor Bains, in his question, stated Brick by Brick had been a failure and that, in his opinion, corruption was endemic within the organisation as it had not delivered the number of affordable homes which had been promised. Councillor Bains queried how this made the Cabinet Member feel and whether she would apologise to the vulnerable families on the housing waiting list which had been let down due to, his opinion, her complicity and inaction to rectify the issues within Brick by Brick.

In her response, Councillor Avis noted the language used by Councillor Bains was incorrect and suggested it was inflammatory. Councillor Avis pointed to the RIPI which noted that there was a responsibility of all councillors to take their role seriously and to challenge respectfully. The Cabinet Member stated that she was sorry for the financial situation the council was in.

Following interruptions from Members, Madam Mayor invited the Interim Chief Executive to speak to the meeting. Katherine Kerswell, Interim Chief Executive, stated that whilst she appreciated that the issues were heightened and Members wanted to ensure their views were heard, interjecting whilst a Member was speaking was not permissible in the Council Chamber. The Interim Chief Executive brought to Members attention the Council's Standing Orders and the Members Code of Conduct which required Members to treat one another with respect and requested that Members abided by Madam Mayor's rulings.

Madam Mayor explained that allegations of corruption or similar allegations were not permissible in the Council Chamber under the Council's Constitution.

Councillor Avis invited the Leader, (as the lead member for Brick by Brick), to answer the question from Councillor Bains. The Leader, highlighted the RIPI and the reports which were due to be discussed later in the meeting which sought to strengthen governance arrangements and the council's role as sole shareholder. The Leader, however did raise concerns in relation to the language used within the question and stated that there was no evidence that corruption had taken place.

In her question, **Councillor Jewitt** noted that the covid-19 pandemic had further contributed to resident's financial insecurity and was impacting on their ability to pay rent. In light of this, Councillor Jewitt questioned what action the council was taking to address those issues.

In her response, Councillor Avis, thanked Councillor Jewitt for speaking on the situation that many Croydon residents had found themselves in. There were a number of factors impacting the situation and the Cabinet Member highlighted that earnings in Croydon was lower than other local authorities, austerity and Universal Credit which could lead to residents ending up in poverty and being homeless. The council had been trying to build new homes in Croydon, including affordable homes and officers were working to place families in affordable private accommodation. Furthermore, pan-London solutions were also being considered to stop council's competing with one another for placements.

Councillor Jewitt, in her supplementary question, asked whether the Cabinet Member would be interested in reintroducing the Fair Rent Council to enable the council to ensure landlords were not able to unfairly impact families' home life.

Councillor Avis confirmed that it would be good to reintroduce Fair Rents and that she was aware that there were many people who were lobbying for the reintroduction.

Councillor Stranack, in his question, stated that the budget proposal would see cuts of millions of pounds from the voluntary sector whilst asking the sector to take on responsibility for adult social care packages and other services. Councillor Stranack, questioned how the council expected the

voluntary sector to take on those additional tasks when its funding had decreased.

In response the Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Resilience, Councillor Wood, confirmed that as part of the process of balancing the budget that there would be to consider some cuts to the voluntary sector. The Cabinet Member stated that he appreciated the work of the sector, which was one of the largest in London. It was noted, that for six years, funding for the sector had been protected and in the previous year had been increased, whilst some council's in London did not fund the voluntary sector. Stopping funding for the sector was not being proposed but adjustments and difficult decisions would need to be made. The Cabinet Member stressed that the council would continue to support the sector and conversations were ongoing on how best to do this going forward.

Councillor Clark requested an update on the two buildings in the town centre which had Grenfell style cladding in light of the government's proposals in relation to fire safety.

Councillor Avis thanked the Fairfield ward councillors for taking an interest in the two buildings and for speaking with residents of those blocks. The Cabinet Member stated that the advice she had been given by Building Control was that Citiscape was not dangerous and that the council had discharged its responsibilities and it was for the private owner to pursue. In terms of Centrillion, Building Control had been appointed to look at the building and discussions were ongoing to address the cladding.

Pool 2

With the end of the time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the first pool, Madam Mayor signalled she was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the second pool. Councillor King, Councillor Muhammad Ali and Councillor Young were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor King, Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal, informed Members the Chancellor had delivered his statement on the 2021/22 Spending Review the previous week. Key aspects of the Spending Review were highlighted; it was noted that it covered one year only rather than three which would make it difficult to plan in the medium term. The council tax referendum limit had remained at 2% and the adult social care precept could be set at 3% of core funding. The Cabinet Member stated this would equate to an increase of 4.5% in cash terms and that equated to an additional £7.5 million in revenue however £6 million had already been assumed with the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Cabinet Member further noted that the New Homes Bonus had been retained, however it was proposed that there would be a public sector pay freeze. An impact assessment on the full impact was being undertaken and would inform the budget setting process for 2021/22.

Councillor Muhammad Ali, Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon, highlighted the consultation on the Crystal Palace and South Norwood Low

Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) was open until the end of the week and all stakeholders were encouraged to engage with the consultation.

Councillor Clouder noted that the covid-19 pandemic had impacted London public finances greatly, including Croydon Council's, and questioned what the current covid-19 funding was.

Councillor King agreed that the pandemic had dramatic impact on finances with an estimated impact of £2.6 billion on local government in London alone. Whilst emergency support had been provided by the government, the Cabinet Member stated it was not sufficient to cover all of the costs for the pandemic. Croydon's return to MHCLG in October 2020 set out an expected expenditure on covid-19 of around £38 million; just under £29 million in unachievable savings and just under £10 million in lost income and fees. The Cabinet Member reported that the total costs of covid-19 amount to £76.5 million while the council had received £33 million in government grants to cover this cost.

Councillor Redfern stated that the Croydon Renewal Plan suggested the closure of one or two of the Household Refuse and Recycling Centres (HRRC) which would mean longer journeys for responsible residents to dispose of their waste and would lead to an increase in fly tipping. Furthermore, Councillor Redfern stated that the surrounding roads of the current HRRCs often experienced high traffic levels and queuing and that this would increase if centres were closed. In light of the concerns she had raised, Councillor Redfern queried which ward would experience the high traffic levels.

In response, Councillor Muhammad Ali stated that the decision to close any centres had not been made and any proposal would be subject to further work and consultation. Furthermore, any such decision would be subject to impact analysis. The Cabinet Member stressed that it was important that the whole situation was reviewed rather than looking at specific elements.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Redfern noted that at the Cabinet meeting the previous week the Cabinet Member had stated that one or two centres would be closed and that her concern was that there was already insufficient capacity and so traffic issues would only increase at the remaining sites.

Councillor Muhammad Ali confirmed that he had stated at the Cabinet meeting that one or more centres would be closed but stated that a decision on which one/s had not been made. Furthermore, the Cabinet Member stated that as part of the Depot Strategy investment would be made at one of the remaining sites to ensure there was capacity in place and the traffic plans would align to ensure demand could be managed.

In his question, **Councillor Jason Cummings** noted that page 19 of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report on the Strategic Review of Companies referred to a revolving investment fund and stated that £272 million lending

limit had been established in the 2018-2022 MTFS which had been breached by £17.5 million. Councillor Cummings questioned who had authorised that breach and under what power.

Councillor King responded and explained the revolving investment fund was being reviewed as part the Brick by Brick recommendations and that the review would also consider the issue Councillor Cummings had raised. Councillor King, stated the recommendations of that review would be presented to Cabinet in February 2020, alongside the budget. In relation to the point raised by Councillor Cummings, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the council's management of loans had not been adequate and the Administration had been looking to ensure a more robust process was in place to ensure such a situation was not repeated.

Councillor Cummings, in his supplementary question, questioned who had authorised exceeding the limit and under what power.

The Cabinet Member explained that the Interim Chief Executive had launched an investigation into the decision making over the course of the period in question which would be led by someone from the Local Government Association (LGA). It was felt that Councillor Cummings question would fall within the remit of the investigation and Councillor King committed to check with the Interim Chief Executive that it would be part of the investigation.

Councillor Prince questioned whether the Cabinet Member agreed that the 4.5% increase in council core spending power was manifestly unfair as the majority of that money would be a result of council tax increases rather than additional funding from the government.

In response, Councillor King replied, that it was positive that the Spending Review had provided for a potential increase of 4.5% in core spending power, however he agreed that the additional money would come from increases in council tax rather than increases to government funding which was required.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Prince questioned whether there would be any additional money left once inflation had been taken into consideration.

Councillor King responded, by saying that there were elements of the Spending Review which were welcomed, such as the extension of the New Homes Bonus and potential additional covid-19 impact spending. Despite this, the Cabinet Member noted that local government was not properly funded and that on a cross-party basis there was a recognition that local government had not been properly reimbursed for the cost of covid-19 which was a factor for some of the issues faced by the council.

Councillor Streeter stated that in 2017, the then, Cabinet Member for Environment & Transport (Councillor King) announced that free parking bays would be introduced across the borough, however since then the council had decided to remove those bays. Councillor Streeter, questioned why it was felt

that free parking bays were needed in the run up to a local election but not when the high street was facing its biggest crises since the Second World War.

In response Councillor Muhammad Ali explained that policy objectives changed over time and the council was responding to the serious threat of air pollution and the parking policy was now aligned to that threat. The growth in the population and density was highlighted by the Cabinet Member and the aim of the Parking Policy was to respond to challenges whilst maintaining access to homes, businesses and other amenities. Furthermore, the Cabinet Member highlighted that registered vehicles in Croydon had grown from 132,000 in 2001 to 248,000 in 2016 and that was a challenge the council needed to respond to. Parking spaces across the borough were generally oversubscribed which, indicates that the upper price point had not been reached.

In his supplementary, Councillor Streeter stated the council faced two crises; the financial crisis and a cultural crisis, as it had struggled with openness and transparency and asked the Cabinet Member to be honest with his answer, that the financial position of the council was driving force for the change.

Councillor Muhammad Ali queried which policy Councillor Streeter felt had been disastrous and noted that the Road Traffic Regulations Act was in place which restricted the ability of councils to increase parking charges to be used for savings. The money raised for parking charges was to be used for transport and highway expenditure.

Pool 3

With the end of the time allocated to questions to the Cabinet Members in the second pool, Madam Mayor signalled she was moving on to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool. Councillor Lewis, Councillor Flemming and Councillor Campbell were invited to make their announcements.

Councillor Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning provided an update on plans regarding the SEND pathway which had been developed with Croydon College and Coulsdon College. The SEND pathway was in its third year and had been an outstanding success with 53 students achieving success in their own communities. The service had been developed further for 19-25 year olds and it hoped to extend the programme into a fourth year also.

Councillor Campbell, Cabinet Member for Families, Health & Social Care informed Council that the One Croydon Alliance had been shortlisted in two categories of the 2020 Health Service Journal which recognised outstanding contributions to health and social care. Croydon had been shortlisted for System Leadership Initiatives and Local Government Partnership.

Councillor Gatland stated that the financial situation faced by the council put vulnerable children at risk as vital services were being cut, such as transport

for nursery children with disabilities. Councillor Gatland questioned how the Cabinet Member could defend the choices which had been made.

In response, Councillor Flemming stated that there were 27 nursery children with disabilities in the borough, and whilst the transport service was not statutory conversations would take place with each family affected. It was noted that some of these children would be entering mainstream schools in September and so that number may change ahead of difficult decisions being made. The Cabinet Member highlighted that many local authorities did not support similar families in other boroughs and any decision to cut services would be difficult as every child mattered.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Gatland stated that previous budget decisions had led to huge levels of debt and decisions that were being made would cause distress and anxiety to vulnerable children, their families and to staff. It was suggested that cuts would continue due to further overspending.

Councillor Flemming stated that the service was underfunded and growth had been planned to address some of the structural issues due to the underfunding. The council was working with PwC to understand benchmarking and support writing budgets for services. Savings would be made in services where it was right and proper. Challenge would be received both externally and from partners at Camden Council to ensure the best service was being delivered for the most vulnerable during the continued improvement journey.

Councillor Bernadette Khan queried what the implications of the spending review on adult social service was.

In response, Councillor Campbell confirmed the council had been working closely with the London Government Association (LGA) in order to reduce costs safely and carefully. Targeted projects had been rolled out which had reduced spending by 5%. The Cabinet Member stated that the council was committed to the eight core ways of working; including direct payments, appraising in-house services and would frequently assessing the financial position.

Councillor Bernadette Khan, in her supplementary question, asked whether the Cabinet Member agreed that the government needed to provide greater certainty of the long term sustainable solution to the funding of adult social care, especially in light of the impact of covid-19.

Councillor Campbell agreed that adult social care had paid the price during the pandemic and the council was still waiting to be recompensed as the government had promised. Since the Care Act 2014, the Cabinet Member stated there had been various initiatives which had not resolved the issue of underfunding. Councillor Campbell was pleased to note that social care had not been forgotten in the future plans of the NHS. An integrated care system was being worked on jointly by both local government and the Nation Health Service (NHS).

Councillor Roche stated that there was evidence within a report issued the previous year that Labour were considering options to close libraries across the borough. This had been denied by the Cabinet Member. It was stated that libraries were particularly used by the elderly and vulnerable residents across the borough and were a lifeline for those who were lonely and isolated. In light of the concerns raised, Councillor Roche, asked what the Cabinet Member's message was to residents who were at risk of losing their local library and whether he would apologise for the financial position the council was in.

The Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration, Councillor Lewis, suggested that Councillor Roche was being disingenuous as the recommendations within the report referred to had been rejected at the time. However, the circumstances at that time were radically different. It was recognised that, now, the council had to make tough decisions to reduce expenditure and that included going out to consultation on the future of five libraries. Councillor Lewis, stated that it was hoped that the consultation would be able to establish alternative operating models, such as the community model used at the Upper Norwood library hub. This would enable the continued use of those sites included within the consultation. The Cabinet Member concluded that there were 13 libraries in the borough which was higher than neighbouring boroughs and the provision needed to be reviewed as part of the budget decisions which had to be made.

In his supplementary question, Councillor Roche stated that further concern was that during a time when the council should be encouraging people to be fit and healthy it would be closing leisure centres. It was questioned which sites were at risk of closure.

Councillor Lewis noted that there had been a debate on the future of Purley pool earlier in the meeting and that he had made commitments to continue conversations with residents and he hoped that it would be possible to explore community models of operation which were cost neutral to the council going forward.

Councillor Fraser queried how sustainable the GLL contract for leisure facilities was in light of usage during the pandemic.

In response, Councillor Lewis noted that there were a number of leisure facilities across the borough, some of which ran on a surplus and others ran at a deficit. During normal times the surplus and deficit was roughly at an equilibrium. During the previous year, with the pandemic, the leisure facilities had been closed for a number of months. Since reopening, facilities were operating at around 40% capacity which put a huge pressure on the operator, GLL. The council was working with GLL to improve sustainability and for the estate as a whole to produce a surplus.

In his supplementary question Councillor Fraser queried what measures had been put in place to improve the sustainability of the contract.

Councillor Lewis reiterated that the council was seeking to enhance the sustainability of the contract by applying for external funding and support, reviewing operation model of some facilities to reduce the cost of operation and developing invest to generate proposals. Additionally, the council was having to consider potentially closing some venues where costs could not be reduced and invest to generate proposals were not appropriate.

Councillor Hopley added her congratulations in relation to the One Alliance being shortlisted for awards. In her question she asked the Cabinet Member how she expected vulnerable residents to survive, when £9million of cuts were being made to care packages.

Councillor Campbell responded, that vulnerable residents would not suffer as they were in good hands and whilst cuts would be made due to the financial position of the council, the council would continue to look after its residents.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Hopley stated the specialist employment disability service had been cut which had left vulnerable residents without support. She asked what the Cabinet Member had against vulnerable residents and questioned whether those impacted would be written to and apologised to.

Councillor Campbell replied by saying, that she had nothing against vulnerable residents and that supporting the most vulnerable had been the reason she had become a councillor. She reiterated that the cuts being made to services was due to the financial position of the council and noted that the previous budgets of the council had been agreed by both Groups and so it was important for all councillors to take responsibility for the financial position.

Councillor Fraser queried what factors had been taken into consideration when selecting the libraries to be included in the consultation.

In response, Councillor Lewis stated that factors had included footfall, book issues, number of sessions, the geography of the libraries, equalities impact of closure and the recent repairs and maintenance costs of the venues. The Cabinet Member confirmed that any proposals would be subject to lengthy and detailed statutory consultations. The consultation would start in the new year.

With an end to the time allocated to questions to Cabinet Members in the third pool, Madam Mayor brought Croydon Question Time to a close.

141/20 **Member Petitions**

Madam Mayor advised Members, following legal advice, it was not possible for Council to receive the petition contained within the report. Council were informed that this was in accordance with Paragraph 3.12.4 of Part 4A of the Constitution which prohibited any petition which pertained to ongoing litigation.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The meeting received the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) Annual Report for 2019/20. Madam Mayor invited Councillor Flemming, in her capacity, as the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel to provide an introduction to the report.

Councillor Flemming informed Council that the reports that had been used to produce the Annual Report had been considered by CPP during the previous year. Councillor Flemming highlighted the contribution of the Empire Members who attended Panel meetings, on a regular basis, and were of different ages. It was noted that prior to the pandemic young people had attended the meetings to speak directly on key areas, such as the Staying Put Policy, which supported 17/18 year olds who were leaving care to remain with their foster carers, where possible. Councillor Flemming commended the young people for their contributions which had resulted in changes to policies.

It was recognised that challenges remained and CPP were looking at key areas such as; health visits and how to undertaken health assessments of young people in care, such as asylum seeking children. Councillor Flemming noted that it had been an interesting year and that following the Ofsted inspection the council's children services had been rated Good.

Councillor Flemming highlighted that one of the key areas going forward would be related to housing. CPP was committed to review and investigate this area. Councillor Flemming concluded that she looked forward to working with members and Empire Members going forward to ensure they were delivering for the young people of Croydon.

Councillor Gatland was invited to ask a question on the Annual Report and thanked officers for their hard work in developing the report and the young people from Empire and others who had attended CPP meetings for their important contributions. Councillor Gatland noted that one the areas of improvement within the Ofsted report had been corporate parenting and highlighted that at the last meeting of CPP, officers had raised concerns that services for vulnerable young people would be impacted by staffing cuts and queried whether staffing levels would be cut or whether caseloads would be increased.

Councillor Flemming responded, that whilst she had focussed on the Empire children she also recognised the fantastic work of others who had been involved in the CPP. Councillor Flemming noted Councillor Gatland attended the meetings also and would be aware that discussions had been held with CPP in relation to social worker retention. Councillor Flemming stated the council were keeping a close eye on staffing levels and had reconfigured adolescent services to ensure sufficient resourcing was available. It was reflected that before the Improvement journey 70% of social workers had

been agency staff and since then the council had been able to reduce that number significantly.

Councillor Flemming further informed Members that there was an upcoming staff webinar and there would be a Children's Race and Equality Review Board meeting taking place which would ensure the voices of staff were being heard. The Cabinet Member committed to continue to champion and support them but stated that she was unable to commit that there would not be any staff losses but staff levels would continually be monitored.

In her supplementary question, Councillor Gatland asked whether the Cabinet Member was only reviewing staffing due to officers raising concerns at CPP meetings and whether caseloads would be increased as it was recognised that this had a negative impact ahead of the 2017 Ofsted inspection.

In response, Councillor Flemming stated that current caseloads were on average between 12 and 14 per social worker. Whilst the council would look at options to increase caseloads as it was stated the London average caseload was 17, Councillor Flemming stressed that this would only be when it was right and proper and would take into account the number of children involved in each case.

Madam Mayor explained that there was no time remaining for further questions on the report and that therefore, this concluded Council's consideration of the report's contents.

Health & Wellbeing Board

The meeting received the Health & Wellbeing Board Annual Report for 2019/20. Madam Mayor invited Councillor Woodley in her capacity as the Chair of the Health & Wellbeing Board to provide an introduction to the report.

Councillor Woodley informed Council that the report summarised the work of the Board from June 2019 to May 2020 and included the measures taking in response to covid-19.

Council was informed the Board had received and agreed the Health & Wellbeing Strategy and the Croydon Health & Care Transformation Plan. Councillor Woodley, highlighted that priority 8 of the Strategy had been to ensure the right people were in the right place and at the right time by working in localities which had been timely when considering the work during the pandemic. Councillor Woodley highlighted the joined up working within Croydon across the council, health and community sector.

The Health Weight workshop was also raised by Councillor Woodley as having taken place in December 2019 which had linked to priority 7 of the Strategy with a stronger focus on prevention. Councillor Woodley explained that the workshop and the development of Health Weight Action Plans for 2020/21 had become particularly relevant when considered in light of the potential impact of covid-19 on those suffering from obesity.

Councillor Hopley was invited to ask a question on the report and queried whether in light of the Report in the Public Interest there was any intention to change the membership, so that the Board represented more of the community and review the governance to ensure well informed decisions going forward.

The meeting had reached the specified time for it to conclude (10pm), so Madam Mayor put to Council that in accordance with Paragraph 1.12(5) of Part 4A of the Constitution that the meeting be extended by 20 minutes to enable discussion of items to be concluded.

This was proposed by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Hamida Ali) and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition (Councillor Perry). The motion to extend the meeting was agreed unanimously by Council.

In response to the question, Councillor Woodley stated that Councillor Hopley was a member of the Board and had seen that all partners on the Board had worked really well in producing the Strategy and Plan which had been signed by members of the Board. Councillor Woodley further noted that there were representatives from the Asian Resource Centre (ARC) and Croydon Voluntary Action (CVA). There were often a representative of the BAME Forum in attendance also. Additionally, teachers had been invited to attend to speak on the work they were doing to support young people's mental health. Councillor Woodley concluded that the partners of the Board were able to engage with the business but that the Board also welcomed external input where appropriate.

In her supplementary question Councillor Hopley stated the current membership of the Board was political and the core membership was no longer community based. It was queried whether members of the Opposition would be invited to Executive Group meetings going forward and whether the Vice-Chair would be an Opposition member.

In response, Councillor Woodley noted that Dr Agnelo Fernandes was the Vice-Chair of the Board and whilst she was not aware of any proposed changes to the membership she was open to suggestions, such as a second Vice-Chair.

Councillor Fitzpatrick was invited to ask a question on the report and raised concerns in relation to the inequalities faced by the autistic community and requested information on the commitment of the Board and health partnership to taking forward the Autism Strategy, addressing the inequalities experienced by the community and embracing autism by refreshing the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

In response, Councillor Woodley thanked Councillor Fitzpatrick for all of his work as the Autism Champion and for presenting a comprehensive report to the Board in October. Councillor Woodley further noted that he had attended a Board workshop in July which had related to inequalities during covid-19

and had highlighted the issues being experienced. Councillor Woodley confirmed that the Board would look at the recommendations within the Autism Strategy and would consider them as part of a future review of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Madam Mayor explained that there were no remaining questions on the report and that therefore, this concluded Council's consideration of the report's contents.

143/20 **Council Debate Motions**

Following the agreement of the Group Whips, Madam Mayor advised there were no Council Debate Motions at this meeting.

144/20 **Recommendations of Cabinet to Council for decision**

Madam Mayor informed Council that she had received a request for all of the recommendations contained within the report be referred for debate. Following consultation with both Groups it had been agreed that the three sets of recommendations would be considered individually with three speakers from each Group speaking for up to three minutes each.

The Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan and the Croydon Renewal Improvement Board

And

The Croydon Renewal Financial Recovery Plan and Submission to MHCLG for the Capitalisation Direction

In moving the recommendations contained in the report, **Councillor King** noted that the report were perhaps the most important to be presented to Council in recent years. There was considerable detail in report in relation to organisational, financial and managerial challenges faced by the council and it categorises the actions and inactions which had contributed to the weakened financial position.

Councillor King stated the report recommended the development of a Croydon Renewal Plan and the establishment of an independent chaired Improvement Board. It was noted that all of the improvement proposals were framed around different areas of work and would include new priorities, ways of work, improved governance, management and leadership practice. Service improvements were planned to better manage demand and costs.

Council were informed by Councillor King that a review of the Member and officer Code of Conduct was planned. This would fully embed the Nolan principles in all of the council's work. It was recognised that the financial gap for the following year remained significant with over £30million of savings identified and more required in addition to a successful submission to MHCLG for a capitalisation direction.

Councillor King concluded that the scale and nature of the challenge was unprecedented but that he was confident that with the new Leader and Interim Chief Executive leading the way in delivering the plan that Croydon would be efficient, effective and financially stable going forward.

Councillor Young seconded the recommendations and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Jason Cummings noted that the use of the word 'renewal' meant that something had fallen into disrepair or had failed and that this word represented the current state of Croydon. It was stated that the Plan set for departmental budgets to increase by £105 million to offset budgets which had previously been under forecast; as such there would be no additional services but a promise of an accurate budget only.

Councillor Cummings stated that when the savings of £41 million were applied there remained a budget gap of £64 million which had to be breached by savings; which it was stated, would be felt by residents as cuts.

It was stated by Councillor Cummings that his response was not in relation to the content as he recognised that a number of officers had put in a large amount of work into developing the Plan but rather his concerns were in relation to the delivery. Councillor Cummings noted that the Leader and Deputy Leader had been members of the Cabinet which had overseen the issues. Additionally, the chairs of the General Purposes and Audit Committee (GPAC) and Scrutiny and Overview Committee remained in post. It was suggested that having listened to the Leader being interviewed on BBC London Radio that evasion of answering questions which, in Councillor Cummings opinion was a tactic used by the previous Leader, would continue and as such Councillor Cummings did not trust the delivery of the Plan. Councillor Cummings concluded that he felt Croydon deserved better and so he was unable to support Labour's plan for renewal.

Councillor Millson stated that impossible promises started with farfetched resolutions which then became dogma code which ignored the needs of residents and that, in his opinion, this had happened with the Labour administration in Croydon. It was stated that promises were made that revenue would flow from home builder which had failed to build houses and from a hotel that has had to close, and that social care budgets which had repeatedly overspent would suddenly become balanced.

The issues listed by Councillor Millson would continue, he felt, under the Croydon Renewal Plan. He reported that queues were already an hour long at the Factory Lane recycling site and raised concerns that with the proposal to close a centre and the end of the free bulky waste collection there would be a dramatic increase in fly tipping. Concerns were further raised that residents would be impacted by library closures but that the most painful cuts would be felt by the most vulnerable adults and children in the borough. Councillor Millson stated that the cuts represented the human cost of what he felt were the impossible promises of the Labour Administration.

Councillor Millson stated residents knew that the promises had led to the council's financial position but he reported that they could not comprehend why those at fault were still councillors and claiming allowances. He stressed that he felt that the only way those at fault would pay would be with the election of a Conservative Administration in 2022.

It was noted by **Councillor Campbell** that Croydon's social care spend was high in comparison to other boroughs and that the structural deficit had not been addressed in a timely manner which had led to significant overspends. Adequate tracking and monitoring of spend by officers and Members had not been in place which Councillor Campbell stressed was unacceptable. With those issues in mind, Councillor Campbell welcomed the appointment of Rachel Soni as the Interim Director of Commissioning & Procurement as she had a solid understanding of health and social care and her contribution to radical change was reported to be apparent.

Councillor Campbell stressed her commitment to meeting the needs of residents and ensuring that statutory duties of the council were delivered. The focus of the council, it was stated, was to ensure there was a budget in place which funded existing needs and to enable this to be met there would be a reduction in expenditure of 5% within adult social care.

Councillor Campbell concluded that the strength of the Plan would be the Administration's commitment to delivering it and effectively utilising scrutiny, monitoring facilities and challenge from the Improvement Board. She stressed she was confident the plan would be delivered and would be successful.

Councillor Perry stated that he felt that Labour in Croydon had squandered the future of the borough due to its incompetence and financial mismanagement which had seen debt rise to £1.5 billion. He used the analogy that the council had been playing a game of Monopoly by starting a company to build houses and investing in shopping centres and hotels.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Perry that the Plan represented the reduction of services which residents relied on and that the impact would be felt worst disproportionately by the most vulnerable residents in the borough. Councillor Perry noted that the use of the word 'renewal' represented a fresh start but that with 70% of the Cabinet remaining there would be no fresh start in his opinion.

Councillor Perry stated that he felt that the Plan constituted cuts rather than savings, with closures of libraries, HRRC's and cuts to social care budgets and voluntary sector budgets. Concerns were raised that the changes discussed at the meeting were only the start to changes that were to take place.

It was noted that the Leader had earlier highlighted that the council had a controllable budget of £300 million, which Councillor Perry argued that the Administration had demonstrated a lack of management of and continued to

be in denial as to the role they had played in the council's financial position. As such, Councillor Perry concluded that he felt that Labour were unable to deliver the renewal plan and that the Opposition would not support Labour's failure to deliver.

Councillor Young in seconding the motion to approve the recommendations highlighted the aspects of the Plan, including; the financial recovery plan, the submission to MHCLG for a capitalisation direction and an independently chaired Improvement Board which would provide assurances to all stakeholders that the changes required would be made. In light of what the Plan sought to achieve, Councillor Young questioned why the Opposition would speak against it.

Furthermore Councillor Young questioned why the Opposition spoke against a plan to address the council's financial shortcomings which had been highlighted in the RIPI. The report had criticised the resilience of the council and had raised concerns of the role of Members. Councillor Young stated that the council sought to draft a submission to MHCLG for a capitalisation direction to request the funding Croydon required to balance its budget, which the Opposition did not support.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Young that the Opposition had also spoken against the formation of an independently chaired Improvement Board. Councillor Young explained that this was integral to the delivery and success of the Plan. In response to concerns that the Administration was unable to deliver the Plan, Councillor Young stated that in his opinion no evidence had been provide to back up the claim.

Councillor Young concluded that he felt the Opposition should step up and support Croydon by supporting the Plan to enable the council to rectify the situation. Councillor Young called on all Members to support it no matter which Party they were from.

The motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report was put to the vote and **carried**.

Strategic Review of Companies and other investment arrangements Brick by Brick Croydon Ltd ("BBB") Shareholder decision – Directors and articles of association

In moving the recommendations contained in the report, **Councillor Hamida Ali** noted that Council had met on 19 November 2020 to consider the response to the RIPI. At that meeting the auditor's had stressed that the issues contained within their report were systemic and included all Members of Council. Councillor Hamida Ali felt that the Opposition were choosing to distance themselves from taking part in the improvement journey.

Councillor Hamida Ali noted that the RIPI had raised concerns in relation to the council's wholly owned subsidiaries and recommended a review of the company structures to ensure the council was fully exercising its

responsibilities in the council's and public's interest. In response to this, Councillor Hamida Ali noted that a review had been commissioned from PwC and the report of that review was before Council for consideration. The review, had looked at each of the companies; Brick by Brick, the Growth Zone, Croydon Affordable Homes, the Revolving Investment Fund and the Asset Investment Fund; and recommended strengthening governance in all areas.

Councillor Hamida Ali noted that the recommendations before Council related to three areas; drawing up an action plan to respond to the recommendations, commissioning further work from PwC to inform the council of the options available to it in relation to Brick by Brick and asserting the council's role as sole shareholder by amending the Articles of Association to ensure it had access to information and Board vacancies were filled.

Councillor Hamida Ali informed council that the recommendations contained within the PwC report were accepted by the Administration and in response to the report an important action plan would be drawn up which would inform the council's Improvement Plan. This would form part of the submission to MHCLG for a capitalisation direction and any further recommendations from the additional work commissioned would inform future decisions which would protect the council's and public's investment.

Councillor Hamida Ali concluded that she hoped the Opposition would demonstrate commitment to corporate improvement and would support the recommendations contained within the report.

Councillor Avis seconded the recommendations and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Bains stated that, in his opinion, everyone in Croydon considered the Labour Group to be a joke with investments in a hotel which had gone bankrupt and paying grants to controversial art projects. Councillor Bains stated that in his opinion the interview the Leader had given on BBC Radio London had been embarrassing and had shown that she was out of her depth.

It was stated, that in Councillor Bains opinion that the actions of the Labour Administration had been a tragedy of the largest proportions and that Brick by Brick had been the biggest scandal. Councillor Bains suggested Labour had deliberately created a private company so as to avoid public scrutiny. Furthermore, Councillor Bains accused the Chair of Scrutiny & Overview Committee of being more concerned in remaining in his role than ensuring effective scrutiny took place.

Concerns were raised by Councillor Bains that in addition to forming Brick by Brick the council had formed several sub-companies and charities which, he stated, had not undertaken any charitable work.

Councillor Bains concluded that he felt the Labour group had failed on every level and were more concerned with internal politics than improvement and suggested that they should all resign immediately for the future of Croydon.

Councillor Mohan questioned how the council had come into financial difficulty and suggested the reason was outdated left wing ideology. The Westfield project, which he stated was ready to be delivered in partnership with the private sector in 2014, had failed in his belief due to Labour being ideologically opposed to the scheme. This, he stated, had cost millions of pounds in lost council tax. The revenue it was stated would've helped the council's financial long term stability.

Councillor Mohan further stated that Brick by Brick had been set up due to, in his opinion, Labour being opposed to Right to Buy. Due to that opposition, Councillor Mohan suggested Labour had established a complex company which had significantly contributed to the council's financial position.

It was suggested by Councillor Mohan that Labour had always believed that taxpayers money was their own and that they could borrow and spend without consequences and that it was that mentality which had led to the current situation. Councillor Mohan concluded that the only option for Croydon was for the Administration to change following the Local Elections in 2022.

Due to technical difficulties Madam Mayor moved to the next speaker and called Councillor Canning to speak when he was able to access the meeting.

Concerns were raised by **Councillor Hale** that the PwC report detailed a wide range of governance by the council in its relationship with Brick by Brick and Croydon Affordable Homes. It was stated that there had been an absence of adequate financial systems and processes which meant that the accuracy of the Brick by Brick financial information could not be trusted. The council's relationship with Brick by Brick was typified with expired loans and money not being paid back by the company. Councillor Hale raised further concerns that it appeared that the directors of Brick by Brick were only now required to have a strong background in finance due to the mistakes that had already cost the council over £200 million.

Councillor Hale noted that the Opposition had been raising concerns in relation to Brick by Brick for a number of years and stated the Administration had only just begun to understand the issues. Concerns were raised by Councillor Hale, that much loved green spaces had been sold to the company for £1 and planning applications were fast tracked which had caused a lot of anger for residents. Furthermore, a £16 million loan to Brick by Brick to refurbish Fairfield Halls, when the budget for the works was £13 million, was noted by Councillor Hale. In light of the concerns raised Councillor Hale stressed that no further applications or developments should be started.

Councillor Hale stated that the councillors she felt were responsible had remained silent and had not publically apologised for letting down the people of Croydon and officers who were concerned about the future of their jobs. In

conclusion, Councillor Hale stressed that she no longer had any confidence in Labour to deliver; including the plans to rectify the situation.

Councillor Avis began by stating that she had not suggested that she regretted nothing, but that she had said she didn't regret criticising the Opposition or the government for the financial situation the council found itself in. In addition, Councillor Avis questioned Councillor Bains statement that charities had been set up but had not undertaken charitable work, when the council had sought to deliver truly affordable homes for those without. In response to Councillor Mohan's statement that Labour were ideologically driven when, in her opinion, the ideology would have been the government taking responsibility and building homes for the homeless.

Councillor Avis stated she was extremely proud of Croydon Affordable Homes and the LLPs which had been established with the intention to build homes as there were many without. It was quoted that 1010 children had been in emergency accommodation during the previous year and as such Councillor Avis stressed she would not apologise for building affordable homes. In response to claims that affordable homes had not been built Councillor Avis stated 86 homes had been built in the first tranche and in second tranche there would be 250 homes with a further 90 in the pipeline.

In conclusion, Councillor Avis stated that she regretted the financial position the council was in but asked Members to remember why the council had got into that position and their responsibility for the position also.

Councillor Canning noted that Brick by Brick had been established with the best of intentions, however the PwC report had found there was inadequate governance in place and the company had been allowed to underperform. It was stated by Councillor Canning that this had contributed to the council having to issue a Section 114 Notice with over £200 million loaned to the company. However Councillor Canning noted that the council should not forget that corporate debt was already around £1 billion in 2014 when the Labour Administration began.

It was recognised by Councillor Canning that the company had not built the number of new homes it was supposed to and the reason identified by PwC was that the land being built on was often unsuitable for development. It was stated by Councillor Canning that he could understand why some had described Brick by Brick as little more than a Ponzi scheme when taking into consideration the lack of interest being paid or any large payments to the council.

Despite those issues, Councillor Canning stated that the new leadership would look to rectify those mistakes and that began with agreeing the recommendations contained within the report. It was essential, Councillor Canning stressed, that there was robust financial oversight of the company and the proposed changes to the Board was one step towards better management of the company.

Councillor Canning welcomed that, whilst work continued on understanding the best value option in terms of the future of the company, development on new sites paused. Councillor Canning concluded that he was sure that all Members were keen to see the outcome of the PwC report in the New Year.

The motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report was put to the vote and **carried**.

Developing Croydon's new Community Safety Strategy

Councillor Wood noted that a new Community Safety Strategy had been due to be considered by Council in autumn 2020, however the situation had changed dramatically since work began on the development of the strategy. The new strategy was to be underpinned by the council's public health approach to tackling violence. Effective engagement with residents and those who had experienced violence had been agreed by the Safer Croydon Partnership in January 2020 and had been discussed at scrutiny in February 2020.

However, with the advent of covid-19 Councillor Wood stated it had been sensible to rethink the development of the strategy and as such, Council were informed that a new strategy would be brought for approval in 2021. Councillor Wood stressed that whilst a new strategy had not been fully developed, work had continued to keep communities safe. Funding had been secured from Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime (MOPAC) for the Violence Reduction Network in 2021/22 and a further £370,000 had been invested by MOPAC into the Family Justice Centre.

Furthermore, Councillor Wood noted that it had been important to reconsider the strategy in light of issues which had come to the forefront due to lockdown; such as a rise in domestic violence within the borough. Additionally, increased levels of disputes between neighbours had been seen and these changes would inform the new strategy.

Councillor Wood concluded that whilst the new strategy was being developed data would be collected to ensure the council could protect its community. The new strategy, it was stated, would be agile and fit for purpose following development with all stakeholders.

Councillor Patsy Cummings seconded the recommendations and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Stranack noted that much of the meeting had focussed on challenges facing the town's finances but that the report, he felt, highlighted Labour's policy failings also. Since Labour took control in 2014, Councillor Stranack reported crime levels had been on the increase which was in stark contrast the decreasing levels before that. Violent crimes had risen by 64%, vehicle crime had increased by 42% and public order offences had risen by 135%.

Two strategies had been produced by Labour and Councillor Stranack noted that the key aim of the strategy had been how the council alongside key stakeholders would reduce crime. In light of the figures Councillor Stranack had reported he stated that it was clear that the strategies had failed. In addition to increasing levels of crime, Councillor Stranack stated residents felt less safe.

It was noted that the council had a statutory responsibility to publish a strategy. In Councillor Stranack's opinion, the council had a problem as a new strategy would highlight the failure of the previous strategy to tackle crime in Croydon. Concerns were raised by the councillor that the report stated a new strategy would not be published until 2022 and that until that time a failed strategy would be extended. Councillor Stranack highlighted Section Six of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which required authorities to formulate and implement a strategy for the reduction of crime and stated that he felt that by extending the current strategy the council would be breaking the law in relation to its statutory duties.

It was noted by **Councillor Bennett** that the paper presented to Cabinet in October 2020 was when Councillor Hamida Ali had been the responsible Cabinet Member and was 155 pages long. Concerns were raised that the 2017-2020 Strategy had been a poor copy and paste job of the 2014-17 Strategy and was awash with acronyms, flowcharts and spreadsheets.

Councillor Bennett noted the strategy was written to address the issue of crime within the borough but stated that the report included appalling figures. Councillor Bennett stated that the strategy represented real people impacted by crime in the borough.

Concerns were raised that the preamble in the strategy claimed that good progress had been made while on page 5 of the strategy it states that Croydon had the highest number of rapes in London. Furthermore, Councillor Bennett stated Croydon was ranked first for violent crime, sexual abuse and domestic violence in crime. She questioned where the strategy was for supporting those female victims of domestic and sexual abuse, especially considering many of those victims would have been locked down with their abuser during the pandemic. Councillor Bennett called on Councillor Hamida Ali to step up and ensure a new strategy was developed rather than blame the pandemic for not undertaking the required community consultation. It was in Councillor Bennett's opinion unacceptable to vote for the recommendation to extend the strategy.

Councillor Ben-Hassel stated she was surprised that the Opposition were opposed to the practical approach which had been proposed which would enable the development of the right Community Safety Strategy which residents deserve. Councillor Ben-Hassel recalled that a scrutiny meeting which both Councillor Stranack and Councillor Ward attended where the merits of extending the strategy were discussed by the Cabinet Member and officers. It was noted at the meeting that partners had signalled a desire to

play a greater part in co-designing the strategy; which the council had listened to.

Councillor Ben-Hassel explained that a carefully planned extensive consultation and engagement process to co-design the strategy had been disrupted by covid-19. As such, the decision had been made to delay the consultation to enable all stakeholder to participate. It was her view the right decision, especially in light of the change in patterns of crime as a result of the pandemic.

It was recognised that Croydon was lucky to have a well-functioning Family Justice Centre and excellent projects which worked alongside the Centre. The Centre, it was noted, had extended its hours in response to increasing levels of need. This change in crime meant it was right, in Councillor Ben-Hassel view, to pause the development of a new strategy to allow officers to analyse the findings of how covid-19 was impacting crime and to ensure those findings informed the new strategy.

Whilst Councillor Ben-Hassel stated she hoped Opposition colleagues would continue to challenge the Administration, she felt that voting against a common sense approach which enabled the council to fulfil its statutory duty was incorrect. The councillor called on Opposition Members to use their influence on the Government to lobby for Croydon and to raise awareness of the worrying fall in domestic violence prosecutions. In conclusion, Councillor Ben-Hassel encourage Opposition Members to continue to engage on a cross party basis, including scrutiny, which would enable them to take part in the shaping of Croydon's new Community Safety Strategy.

It was noted by **Councillor Ward** that the strategy was an important one as violence could have very large impacts on people's lives and effective action was required. Councillor Ward stated the public health approach to violent crime was a good one which was science based policies and interventions backed by research. Good data was required to have an understanding on the problem and Councillor Ward stated that there was good data within the proposed extended strategy but that he had concerned that there was too much focus on data and not enough on action.

Councillor Ward stressed that the public health approach was centred on action, making interventions, measuring performance and trialling options to see if they made a difference and stopping those which didn't work. It was that approach, Councillor Ward stated was what was missing from the report as he felt that after three years there was little evidence of the public health approach having been applied. He saw little quantitative data on what was and wasn't working but rather, he stated, pages on priorities and intentions only.

To that end, it was stated by Councillor Ward, that the council's performance and project management was just as bad as its financial management. He suggested that of all the targets which had been set, all but three, the council had failed to meet. Whilst he reiterated that the report was an important one

he stressed that he was not confident of Labour being in charge and delivering the strategy.

Councillor Patsy Cummings noted that on 30 October 2017 she had made her maiden speech to Council and that on the day before Aren Mali was killed yards away from the Town Hall. During her maiden speech she recalled that she had walked over to Councillor Jason Cummings and urged him and his colleagues to put aside politics and to work on a cross-party basis to ensure such a tragedy no longer happened. It was recognised that since Aren's death other sons and daughters had been lost but stressed that things were changing in Croydon.

Thanks to the public health approach, Councillor Cummings stated that partners were determined to ensure change took place for the young people in the borough. Councillor Cummings stated the strategy was proposed to be extended due to the pandemic which could not have been predicted. It was stressed by the councillor that the community did not want to hear of Councillor's arguing about dates because what was important was the lives of young people in the borough.

It was noted that the previous day the Metropolitan Police Commissioner (Dame Cressida Dick DBE QPM) had acknowledged that higher proportion of black men were stopped but had stressed that no one had been targeted due to their skin colour. Councillor Cummings stated that in Croydon the police were working with all partners as the disproportionality was recognised. The answer, it was stated, was not to deny the issue but to build community trust and relationships and that work had been recognised by the Deputy Mayor of Policing and Crime (Sophie Linden). It was noted that working with community leaders had been integral to helping families and young people to change their lives. Training for new young police officers including working with community leaders and young black boys was noted by the councillor as being a means to ensure that they could police by consent.

Councillor Cummings concluded that despite the challenges faced in Croydon the Administration was listening to its communities and working with partners and the community to make Croydon safe.

The Council Solicitor was asked to speak in relation to concerns raised by councillors as to the legality of extending the strategy. Councillor's attention was drawn to the Legal Considerations at section 7 of the report which set out the legal framework and the Constitutional framework.

Councillor Stranack made a Point of Order and requested clarification as to whether extending the strategy fulfilled the statutory responsibility to ensure there was a Community Safety Strategy in place. In response, the Council Solicitor confirmed that she would write to the councillor with further detail.

The motion to approve the recommendations as set out in the report was put to the vote and **carried**.

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145/20 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not required.

The meeting ended at 10.06 pm

Signed:

Date:

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