

## Cabinet

Meeting held on Monday, 17 May 2021 at 6.30 pm in Council Chamber, Town Hall,  
Katharine Street, Croydon CR0 1NX

### MINUTES

- Present:** Councillor Hamida Ali, Stuart King, Muhammad Ali, Janet Campbell, Alisa Flemming, Patricia Hay-Justice, Oliver Lewis, Manju Shahul-Hameed and Callton Young
- Also Present:** Councillor Jason Perry, Jason Cummings, Lynne Hale, Simon Hoar, Yvette Hopley, Helen Redfern, Scott Roche, Andy Stranack, Gareth Streeter, Sean Fitzsimons, Robert Ward, Pat Clouder, Jerry Fitzpatrick, Mario Creatura, Leila Ben-Hassel, Simon Brew, Patsy Cummings, Clive Fraser, Bernadette Khan and Louisa Woodley
- Officers:** Doutimi Aseh (Interim Director Law & Governance)  
Chris Buss (Interim Director of Finance, Investment & Risk and Section 151 Officer)  
Matthew Davis (Deputy Section 151 Officer)  
Gavin Handford (Director of Policy & Partnership)  
Sarah Hayward (Interim Executive Director Place)  
Asmat Hussain (Interim Executive Director Resources)  
Steve Iles (Director of Public Realm)  
Elaine Jackson (Interim Assistant Chief Executive)  
Debbie Jones (Interim Executive Director Children, Families & Education)  
Katherine Kerswell (Interim Chief Executive)  
Alison Knight (Interim Executive Director Housing)  
Annette McPartland (Director of Operations)  
Yvonne Murray (Director of Housing Assessment & Solutions)  
Ian O'Donnell (Finance Consultant)  
Rachel Soni (Director of Commissioning and Procurement)  
Stephen Tate (Director of Growth, Employment & Regeneration)

### PART A

- 66/21      **Minutes of previous meetings**
- The minutes of the Cabinet meetings held on 1 March 2021, 8 March 2021, 22 March 2021 and 12 April 2021 were agreed.
- 67/21      **Disclosure of Interests**
- There were none.

68/21

**Urgent Business (If any)**

There were no items of urgent business.

69/21

**Investigation into conditions at 1-87 Regina Road, South Norwood and the Housing Service Improvement Plan**

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Hamida Ali) reflected that the investigators report had provided very clear analysis of both the circumstances which had arisen at Regina Road, but also their impression of the Housing service as a whole. It was noted that it was wholly unacceptable that a minor defect had been allowed to grow into a major problem which had risked the health and safety and had significantly impact resident's quality of life for four years.

The investigators, it was noted, had identified a range of issues across operational teams within the council; including repairs, asset management and tenancy management and to some extent the council's contractor. There was no one reason why the repair work had been left to become a major issue; rather the report listed a number of areas of concern: lack of capacity and competency of staff, poor culture with a lack of care and respect for tenants, systemic problems in how the council communicated and dealt with tenants complaints, weak performance management and poor use of data and intelligence by both the council and contractor.

Furthermore, the Leader noted that the investigators report spoke of a service which was reactive, inward looking, demonstrated outmoded culture and attitude towards tenants, stigmatised tenants, was unresponsive to concerns raised by tenants, councillors or MPs and a lack of information. This had led to opportunities to prevent what was happening being missed repeatedly and the failure to deliver a basic housing service effectively.

The Leader advised that the council had made self-referrals to both the Health & Safety Executive and the Regulator for Social Housing. Their judgements had been published and it was stated that the council had been found in breach of regulations.

In light of the terrible conditions experienced and the investigators findings, the Leader stated that existing practices were to end. It was stressed that the status quo could not be permitted to continue and everyone in the council was focussed on ensuring that change took place.

Members were informed that the report provided a number of updates to Cabinet; including the work which had been undertaken in relation to 1-87 Regina Road and similar housing, action taken to provide assurance of the conditions at similar housing blocks, updates on actions which had been taken to respond to the recommendations of the investigators, planned work to review, investigate and improve the Housing service and

how the council would involve the most important people, tenants, in its work going forward.

The Leader informed Members that the council was undertaking surveys of all the other blocks, filling vacancies in key areas including repairs, gas servicing and resident engagement, a wide review of the Housing service was underway and an externally led board would be established to support the ongoing improvement work within the service and the wider council.

Central to all of the work, the Leader stated, was the experience of tenants and she informed Members that the most concerning discovery had been lived experience of the tenants. She had found it shocking that the council treated residents as less than worthy and stigmatised tenants rather than, as should have been case, treating them as a valued member of the family. The behavioural and culture changes outlined within the report, the Leader noted, would be integral to reaching the necessary cultural changes quickly as the outdated behaviours were totally unacceptable. The Leader stressed that the work outlined within the report was fundamental to the council and the organisation would be judged as to whether it was making a positive difference to tenants' experiences.

The Cabinet Member for Homes (Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice) stressed how shocking and unacceptable she had found the situation; especially as she had benefited from living in council housing during her lifetime. It was stated that the investigation had found conditions to have been horrendous and that the council could not have expected anything less, but the Cabinet Member reiterated that the council was committed to turning the situation around to a point where tenants trusted the authority; however it was recognised that this would take a lot of hard work. It was stressed that every Member of the Council and all officers wanted Croydon to be the best landlord.

It was stated that the Cabinet Member was pleased that a new Interim Executive Director Housing (Alison Knight) had been appointed who would assist the council in driving forward the improvements which were required over the following months. The Cabinet Member thanked the residents who were in attendance and extended an invitation to all tenants to contact her to advise her of the issues they were facing.

The Interim Executive Director Place (Sarah Hayward) advised Members that the Cabinet report included the independent report from Ark and the council's action plan in response to the findings of the report. It was noted that the action plan included both immediate actions; such as reassuring residents that the council was taking important steps quickly to rectify the situation and actions which would be taken in the following months.

Members were advised by the Interim Executive Director Housing that she would be formally starting at the council during the following week

and that one of her initial actions would be to visit tenants to understand their experiences. She sought to assure all in attendance that she was committed to working as hard and as fast as possible to ensure the improvements were made effectively. One improvement, Members were advised, would be the formation of an external Improvement Panel and to ensure cultural change within the department took place to ensure tenants were treated with respect and dignity; as set out in the Social Charter for Housing.

The Interim Chief Executive (Katherine Kerswell) stressed that there was a need to fundamentally change the culture within the housing service. Members were advised that she and the Interim Executive Director Place had met with 150 members of staff from Housing over two days and had talked through the findings of the report investigation report. It was reported that they had been very sombre meetings with a number of staff being deeply shocked and distressed as none had purposefully sought to make tenants lives a misery, but it was recognised that had been the result due to the lack of action taken.

It was stressed by the Interim Chief Executive that all staff needed to take collective responsibility and needed to work together to put things right. Members were advised that the response from those meetings was that all staff wanted to work to improve the service and be part of the solution. In response to the Cabinet Member for Homes, comments, the Interim Chief Executive confirmed that it was absolutely important that the relationship between the council and its tenants did need rebuilding and was an aim of the improvement journey for the council.

Members were advised that the Improvement & Assurance Panel were working closely with the council on the improvement plan and the Interim Chief Executive thanked the Panel members for their support and advice.

The Interim Chief Executive advised Members that paragraph 10.1 should state that the salary costs were gross costs and included pension and National Insurance contributions and was for a fixed term contract. Furthermore the costs of the salary were being appropriately met by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Stuart King) reflected that the report was extremely shocking and sombre reading for all. It was noted that the Tenants & Leaseholder Panel was due to meet in April 2021 but the meeting had not taken place; in light of this the Cabinet Member suggested the Panel should meet soon to discuss the findings of the report and consider the development of the Housing Improvement Board as it was felt that it was very important that the voice of the tenant was heard within the process.

It was noted that at paragraph 4.5 of the report that fire risk assessments had been undertaken in October 2020 and the Cabinet Member requested assurance that actions identified as part of those assessments

had been addressed. Section 6.8 of the report, the review of emergency and temporary accommodation, was welcomed as it was felt that the issues identified by Ark were likely to be symptomatic across the service and needed to be taken into account. It was further noted that section 6.1 of the report looked at the issues which Ark had identified as requiring immediate response; one of which was an outmoded culture and attitude amongst a number of staff towards tenants. The action identified was for managers to challenge any such outmoded attitudes or examples of showing a lack of respect to tenants. The Cabinet Member stressed that he felt that there was no place in the Housing service for anyone who did not treat every tenant with absolute respect and dignity.

Whilst the actions in Appendix 3 of the report were welcomed, the Cabinet Member suggested that the accountability column should include the name of the officer, rather than just the job title, so that residents could see that there were real people account of the improvements which were due to be made.

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal concluded by querying when tenants would see real and visible changes to the Housing service which was due to be led by the Interim Executive Director Housing.

In response, the Leader of the Council stated that the full and proper engagement would take place with tenants and that she and the Cabinet Member for Homes had met with the Housing Scrutiny Panel to discuss their work on voids. That work, it was noted, had highlighted the need for the council to turnaround properties that were empty in a timely manner as there were people in the borough who desperately needed them. That turnaround should be in region of 20 days, but recent performance was around 100 days with around 272 empty properties in the borough. The Leader stressed that this was an important area for the council to focus on as there were a number of families in emergency or temporary accommodation. Furthermore, the Leader noted that at Regina Road there had been an empty property which had not been managed properly.

The Leader committed that the council would work with the Tenants & Leaseholder Panel and the Housing Scrutiny Panel, which did important work to engage with tenants in the borough and could support the shaping of the action plan.

The Cabinet Member for Homes informed Members that whilst the Tenant & Leaseholder Panel had not met they had taken time to listen to Panel members and tenants and were due to discuss the report and take questions from tenants that week. It was stated that the Cabinet Member had a vision which she would work on which was for greater engagement with tenants across the borough and would support the formation of forums at each site to support that engagement and improved dialogue with tenants. The Cabinet Member stated this would empower residents to make choices which they had previously not had the opportunity to do.

In response to concerns raised in relation to the fire risk assessments, the Interim Executive Director Place stated that concerns had been raised by Ark early into their investigation. She advised Members that she had taken immediate steps to understand where the council was in responding to the actions following the assessments and stated that she was confident that the council was responding to those actions. Whilst she was confident the actions were being managed she advised Members that she did not feel the council was sufficiently recording the work which had been done; with that in mind she had commissioned an audit of the fire risk assessments to give the council and tenants assurance that the work had been done appropriately. It was felt that it was recording of the safety work that was the issue rather than the work having not being undertaken.

The Interim Executive Director Place advised Members that delegated authority was based upon delegating to a position rather than to an individual. However, it was noted that for future iterations of the action plan, the name of the current post holder would be included alongside the job title to ensure that the document was more personalised.

In response to the query in relation to when residents would see real change the Interim Executive Director Housing advised that within her first month of the council she would expect the lack of empathy and out of date attitudes to have changed. A full plan of when repairs would be undertaken and other issues resolved would need to be finalised but she stressed that cultural change would need to be immediate and would be discussed in her first staff briefing on the following day.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning (Councillor Alisa Flemming) stated that she welcomed the report and understood first hand, as a council tenant, how challenging it could be to get issues resolved; especially with Axis. It was noted that recommendation seven of the action plan related to residents being unaware of who to contact to report issues. With this mind, the Cabinet Member queried how the council would ensure that both new tenants and current tenants had this information and suggested that details should be part of the welcome pack and that an annual reminder should be circulated. In terms of the repairs, the Cabinet Member stressed that it was important that to ensure that the service to report repairs was fit for service so to ensure that the anxiety experienced by tenants was alleviated as soon as possible.

In response, the Interim Executive Director Housing agreed that it was incredibly important that tenants knew who to contact, as well as knowing what they can expect from the council and what the council should expect from them. Members were advised that there should be a clear social housing contract in place with tenants which formed part of the tenancy agreement. It was confirmed that it was important that it was clearly set out that should a complaint be made that they could expect a response within a set number of days as it was recognised that this would alleviate

some of the stress experienced by residents. Communication, it was stressed, was key to support the relationship with tenants.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning noted that it was important that the council supported families as outstanding repairs could have a long term impact on children and young people. In response, the Interim Executive Director Housing advised Members that it was important to the work of the council to ensure that children were protected and schooling was not impacted, but that it was recognised that more work needed to be done in terms of safeguarding and ensuring housing staff were working closely with colleagues in children's and adults' social services. Members were advised that this was an area which would be incorporated within the training plan and improvement plan.

The concerns raised by Cabinet Members were shared by the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon (Councillor Muhammad Ali) and it was stressed that as an organisation, the council needed to work harder to earn the trust of residents in addressing the significant issues raised within the report. Whilst immediate actions were being undertaken, the Cabinet Member queried what long term actions were being taken to ensure there was long term sustainable solutions. In response, the Interim Executive Director Place stated that the idea behind the Improvement Board was to drive long term improvements. The action plan dealt with immediate actions which would be completed within the short to medium terms, but the Interim Executive Director Place advised that it was intended the Board would be in place to deal with the required systemic change within the service to deliver the ambition of a good service.

The Leader of the Council welcomed Ms Fransoy Hewitt to the Cabinet meeting and stated Members were keen to hear her thoughts in light of her experiences and what she had heard in terms of the council's commitment to address the situation. The Leader stated that all Members were appalled by what she and her family and neighbours had experienced.

Ms Fransoy Hewitt challenged Members as to how the situation even arose as she had written to her MP and spoken to a number of departments in the council. She noted that there were a number of people in attendance at the meeting and questioned how no one knew what was happening and the impact it was having on her and her family's mental wellbeing. Furthermore, she questioned why no one had visited her property to see what the issue was despite the numerous times she had contacted the council.

The Leader responded that she had been shocked that the council had been made aware of the situation long before it had been investigated which had led to a minor defect becoming a major issue with living conditions that no one should have experienced. The Leader thanked Ms Hewitt and residents for sharing their experiences with investigators so lessons could be learnt.

It was noted by the Leader that frustration and anxiety would have been caused due to having to report the situation on a number of occasions and to a number of people, and whilst MPs and councillors were told the issue had been addressed it was acknowledged that this was clearly not the case. The report was intended to answer the question of how did the situation happen, and the Leader stated that the investigators had found that there were a series of issues including staffing. The council recognised this issue and the Leader stated there was a clear commitment to ensuring behavioural and cultural change took place to ensure Ms Hewitt's and Regina Road residents experiences never happened again. Changes within the council, it was recognised, would not change the experiences of those impacted residents for which the Leader stated she was truly sorry for.

The Cabinet Member for Homes acknowledged that she would never truly know what Ms Hewitt had personally experienced but stated that having stood in her flat she was passionate that it was an environment no one should have lived in and that no one should ever experience in future. In terms of the reason for it happening, the Cabinet Member felt that it was due to a lack of ownership and a lack of love for another human being. It was reiterated that this mentality was unacceptable and should never have happened. The Cabinet Member stated that should anyone have visited Ms Hewitt's flat they would not have slept knowing that a family was having to live there and that she and the Leader had to hold back tears when they visited. She stated that she was committed to leading the required change and would continue to speak with residents to ensure such a situation never occurred again.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning noted that Ms Hewitt had made reference to the impact on her mental health and reflected upon the effort that she would have had to have made to raise the issue time and again. The Cabinet Member made a plea to all local authority staff to remember that there was a person and family on the other end of the phone and that the call was about more than just a repair.

Ms Hewitt noted that the Leader had said that she had visited Regina Road and spoken to tenants, but highlighted that there were a number of tenants who had not had the opportunity to speak to her and were still waiting to raise their concerns directly with the Leader. It was stated that whilst it was nice to have panel meetings and to make plans for improvements; residents wanted to speak and put their points across as many were still suffering and needed help and support.

In terms of repairs, Ms Hewitt highlighted that despite moving into a new property she still had outstanding repairs and had been informed that they would not be resolved until June 2021. The frustration of the situation was highlighted by Ms Hewitt as she felt that she had to continually reach out to people who did not care about the situation she was facing as there was a continuous lack of action. It was noted that tenants in Croydon did

not trust the council as it felt like all the staff were only there for a job and did not care about the residents.

The Leader stressed that such experiences stopped at that point. The Cabinet and officers were committed to changing the experiences of tenants as their experience had been totally unacceptable. The Leader stated that she and the Cabinet Member for Homes were keen to meet with the residents of Regina Road and were due to meet some tenants later that week. Additionally, Members were informed that the council had written to all residents of the blocks of flats on Regina Road and encouraged tenants to share their experiences.

The Leader reflected that at the meeting which had taken place on 4 May with residents of 2 – 86 Regina Road that had reported issues with leaks and she assured residents that those concerns were being looked into. Miss Hewitt, Mr McNally and Miss Warren were thanked for continuing to share their experiences and it was hoped they would continue to engage with the council as they and other residents would be the judge of whether improvements were being made.

In terms of Ms Hewitt's outstanding repair, the Leader confirmed that officers would be looking into this and she would be requesting an update as soon as possible on progress which had been made.

The concerns raised in terms of the lack of care shown by staff was abhorred by all in attendance and the Leader noted that the Interim Chief Executive and Interim Executive Director Housing were meeting with all staff in Housing to discuss the importance of respect and dignity as it was the council's ambition to be the best service in London. Whilst it was recognised by the Leader that residents in the Public Gallery had laughed at such a suggestion due to their recent experiences, but reiterated that it was an important ambition as it was one which all residents should expect and receive. All residents, it was stressed by the Leader, deserved to be treated with care and love and staff should always keep in mind that there were real people and families behind each interaction.

Miss Hewitt reported to Members that she had experienced rude staff who showed no compassion. Concerns were raised that since the start of the pandemic staff appeared to be laid back as they were working from home and were judging tenants for the situation they were in. It was noted that it was not the job of Housing staff to judge tenants but it was their role to assist in resolving issues, such as repairs to properties. Miss Hewitt reported that a number of tenants had similar experiences of feeling that they were being judged and that staff had been rude.

Miss Hewitt stated that she had been pleading with council staff to assist her and the only response she had received was to contact Axis, rather than an officer taking responsibility to understand what the situation was and to ensure that it was resolved. It was noted that animals were not expected to live in such conditions, but that due to a lack of care families

were being left to live in flats suffering from extreme damp. Due to her experiences with the council, Miss Hewitt reported that she was suffering from constant headaches and was fed up with the treatment. Furthermore, she informed Members that due to such poor treatment residents in Croydon were no longer able to handle the situation they were being left in and were looking for avenues out; including overdosing on pills. She pleaded for councillors and officers to resolve the situation; and should they not be able to that they left their jobs for others to join the council who would be able to drive forward the required improvements.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Homes stressed that she would not be leaving as she wanted to work to ensure that the service improved and that in time Miss Hewitt would be able to experience those improvements.

The Interim Chief Executive offered Ms Hewitt a personal apology and one from the whole staff body for the way she, Mr McNally and Miss Warren had been treated. She reported she had stood in both Ms Hewitt's and McNally's flats and stated that she was in awe of the strength shown by them. It was noted that a number of council staff who worked within the Housing service were Croydon residents, and so part of the community. The Interim Chief Executive advised the meeting that staff had reported feeling ashamed and horrified of what had happened, and that their neighbours had been questioning them on how they could treat any with such disregard.

It was felt that Ms Hewitt and the Cabinet Member for Homes were right in suggesting that the underlying issue had been that no member of staff had taken ownership and recognised that it was their job to care and resolve the issue. The Interim Chief Executive committed that she would work to put things right as no one should have had to live in such conditions. The need to treat people with decency was of the utmost importance, as the Interim Chief Executive reflected that she understood the importance of giving people that support as she had grown up in the council housing herself.

Ms Hewitt queried whether staff undertook training and what the timeframe for the planned training was. In response, the Leader of the Council stated that the council had wanted to share the action plan as quickly as possible and it was recognised that more detail was required, such as timeframes. It was noted that one of the observations from the investigators had been that there was a lack of training available for staff which would be rectified. Furthermore, the Leader suggested that it would be of benefit if tenants could assist in shaping the training and provide feedback on whether they had seen any improvements following staff being trained.

Members were informed by Ms Hewitt that two tenants were still experiencing a large volume of disrepair and were continuing to be ignored and tenants across the borough continued to have outstanding repairs which needed to be resolved. Furthermore, concerns were raised

that a number of residents continued to live in temporary accommodation after 10 years as there was a lack of communication. This, it was noted, led to residents being unable to plan as they were unaware of what may happen.

The Leader stated that temporary accommodation had been included in the wider review as it was felt that the issues would be wide reaching, and it had been found that there were a number of residents in temporary accommodation for a significant amount of time.

In terms of council residents who were experiencing ongoing disrepair, the Leader stated the council were seeking to establish who continued to have outstanding repairs and what action had been taken. It was recognised that the council needed to keep reaching out to tenants so that it could establish a full picture and Cabinet Members welcomed tenants contacting them to tell them of their experience.

The Leader stated that she recognised that more work needed to be done to ensure that the council was hearing from all residents but stressed that there was a clear commitment and expectation for improvements to be made. Ms Hewitt was thanked for speaking to Cabinet and sharing her experiences, and the Leader welcomed her contribution and stated that she hope Ms Hewitt and tenants would engage with the council to ensure the improvements were being felt.

Whilst Ms Hewitt thanked the Cabinet Member for Homes for inviting her to speak at the meeting and suggested that tenants be invited to speak at council meetings going forward; concern were raised that talk was not enough and that significant action was required which tenants could experience.

The Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration (Councillor Oliver Lewis) reflected that empathy was one of the words of the year and that it appeared that the council had lost its empathy for tenants and residents. This was evident in Ms Hewitt's experiences and that of other tenants. Whilst it was noted that there was new leadership in the Housing service, the Cabinet Member queried how residents and tenants would feel a change in the culture and reintroduction of empathy in the interactions with staff.

In response, the Interim Chief Executive advised that there was an important piece of work to be done in terms of officers putting themselves in the shoes of the person receiving their service. Ensuring that officers were identifying with the tenant, showing them the respect that they deserved and were ensuring that help, such as a repair, was being done in a timely manner. This, it was noted, would require large scale behavioural change and would require a lot of planning. Furthermore, the Interim Chief Executive reflected that it would be important to understand from tenants what would convince them that things had changed.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery (Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed) thanked Ms Hewitt for sharing her experiences and reflected that hearing from Ms Hewitt personally what she and her family had been going through had been distressing and emotional but was a reflection of what tenants had experienced.

In terms of the action plan, the Cabinet Member noted that timescales were incredibly important and would show that progress was being made to address the issues in terms of repairs and the wider housing issues. It was noted that recommendation 4, to identify problems in other high rise blocks, would be a large task for the council to complete. In respect of staffing, the Cabinet Member noted that staff were invested in improving the council but queried how the council would support staff to address the issues raised by residents.

The Interim Executive Director of Place advised Members that immediate steps had been taken with staff to improve the service and challenge some of the behaviours. Meetings had taken place with herself, the Interim Chief Executive and staff and more were due to take place. It was noted that the investigation had identified that the service was very inward looking and did not learn from best practice from other authorities. As such, as part of the improvement work learning from best practice would take place alongside training and the wider cultural work taking place in the council.

Councillor Clive Fraser apologised to Ms Hewitt and stated that he had wished that he had spoken to her before the situation had got so horrendous. He noted that he and Councillor Patsy Cummings had knocked on the doors of the residents of Regina Road, but that he was still struggling to get responses from officers on the issues he had raised. Councillor Fraser stated that the failings were systemic across all of the blocks at the site; not only in terms of upkeep but also in relation to communication with tenants.

At the heart of the issues experienced was a lack of respect and action shown by council staff and Councillor Fraser stated that real cultural change was necessary to overcome the systemic problems, such as ongoing leaks and rats in the kitchen, which had been experienced by tenants. Councillor Fraser committed that he and Councillor Patsy Cummings would continue to knock on doors to understand and to ensure action was taken as fundamentally the council had let tenants down.

The Leader thanked Councillor Fraser and Councillor Patsy Cummings for all their work and noted that the investigators had found complaints raised by ward councillors had not been acted upon appropriately.

The Leader of the Opposition (Councillor Jason Perry) raised concerns that only one member of the Opposition would be allowed to ask a question on such an important issue and it was felt that it was important that the Cabinet heard from the Opposition also. In response, the Leader

stated that Cabinet meetings were Executive meetings and there was an opportunity for Question Time at Council meetings.

The Shadow Cabinet Member for Housing (Councillor Lynne Hale) extended her thanks to Ms Hewitt for speaking to Members that evening and sharing her awful experiences as it was noted that it would not have been an easy thing to do as the whole situation had clearly been distressing and remained so. Ms Hewitt was thanked for shining a light on the appalling service provided by Housing, which had not only been her experience but the experience of countless residents across the borough.

Ms Hewitt's ongoing suffering, including the impact on her mental health, was highlighted by the Shadow Cabinet Member along with the outstanding repairs on her new property; which were stated to be wholly unacceptable. The Cabinet Member for Homes was urged by the Shadow Cabinet Member take personal responsibility to ensure her case was dealt with immediately as it was noted that Ms Hewitt had suffered enough and that she and her family deserved so much more.

The appointment of the Interim Executive Director of Housing was welcomed by the Shadow Cabinet Member, along with the steps which had already been taken to improve resident engagement. However concerns were raised that there was a long standing resident's forum and the discontinuation of ward visits had been a mistake. It was felt by the Shadow Cabinet Member that the publishing of the Ark report alongside the news of a Social Housing Regulatory break, whilst unsurprising given the circumstances, was an indictment of the running of the council. Given the ongoing issues which had lasted a number of years, the Shadow Cabinet Member queried how the Leader would ensure accountability for those responsible councillors, whose portfolios had included housing. Furthermore, the Shadow Cabinet queried how long the Cabinet Member had been aware of the complaints and issues within the repair service.

In response, the Leader noted that the report made it clear that councillors and MPs had been raising questions but that the responses provided included inaccurate information. Whether that was due to capacity concerns within the services, lack of training or communication with the contractor; the issues showed that senior management were not aware of the issues and so demonstrated that there was a breakdown within the service which needed to be addressed. By having an externally led Improvement Board it was hoped that the council would move away from an internal focus and would receive external challenge and assurance.

The Cabinet Member for Homes, in response, stated that she had always taken ownership of any issues which had been raised with her and welcomed the Shadow Cabinet Member to take ownership also and join her in meeting residents and ensuring action was taken.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED: To**

1. Fully accept the findings of the report of the independent investigation into the housing conditions at 1-87 Regina Road, a council-owned property in South Norwood - the investigation report is attached at Appendix 1 of the report;
2. Recognise that the housing conditions in the affected flats at Regina Road are completely unacceptable and reiterate the Leader's full apology to the tenants concerned;
3. Note the Council's response to the conditions at Regina Road: rehousing the tenants affected and responding to other urgent issues identified in the report;
4. Note the Council's steps to identify whether there are any issues at other council-owned high-rise blocks of flats, and the steps to resolve any problems identified;
5. Adopt the Council's initial action plan for the housing service;
6. Note that a wider review of the Council's housing services, including delivery of the repairs service, will be conducted and will consider how the Council fully involves its tenants and leaseholders, both in terms of responding to issues raised and in the co-design and co-delivery of services;
7. Note the exercise of delegated authority by the Council's Chief Executive under Part 4J 3.3 paragraph 2 of the council's Constitution to appoint an Interim Executive Director of Housing for an initial period of six months to bring additional capacity to provide new leadership and direction for the housing service, conduct a review of the wider housing service, and lead the development and implementation of a longer-term Housing Improvement Plan for the service. This will be reviewed after six months by the Appointments Committee in accordance with the council's Constitution.
8. Agree to the establishment of an independently-chaired Housing Improvement Board, the membership of which will include council tenants and leaseholders, and independent housing experts, to oversee the development and implementation of the Housing Improvement Plan;
9. Delegate authority to the Interim Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Leader and Cabinet Member for Homes to agree the final membership and constitution of the Housing Improvement Board together with its Terms of Reference;

10. Note that, in accordance with their delegated authority, the Chief Executive will consider, in consultation with the Director of Human Resources, what, if any, investigation is required to be undertaken in accordance with its agreed staff policies and procedures;
11. Fully welcome the recommendations of the Social Housing White Paper 'The Charter for Social Housing Residents', in particular the focus on the importance of treating residents with respect and ensuring the voices of tenants and leaseholders are heard;
12. Note that the report of the investigation and the Council's initial action plan will be shared with the Tenants and Leaseholders Panel, Housing Scrutiny Panel, Scrutiny and Overview Committee, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), Croydon's Improvement and Assurance Panel, the Regulator of Social Housing and the Local Government Association; and
13. Note that a report will be made to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to engage its members on the initial action plan, progress in implementation and developing the Housing Improvement Plan.

70/21

### **Ongoing Review of Brick by Brick Croydon Ltd and associated matters relating to the company**

The Leader of the Council (Councillor Hamida Ali) informed Members that the report provided an update following the decisions made by Cabinet in February 2021, but did not include a final decision on the future of the company as that would be considered at a future meeting of Cabinet. It was noted that the report principally sought agreement in terms of how the council accounted for the costs of the Fairfield Halls refurbishment, agreement to acquire 104 homes for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and approve an additional £10 million as working capital for Brick by Brick; should it be necessary.

It was further noted that the report sought to address the concerns raised by the external auditor in their Report in the Public Interest (RIPI) in terms of the purchase of homes from Brick by Brick which had initially been discussed by Cabinet in June 2020. Appendix 2 of the report, it was stated, sought to address the concerns; in particular in relation to the circular nature of the funding, and set out why the council felt the purchase of the homes was an appropriate decision.

The Interim Director of Finance, Investment & Risk (Chris Buss) drew Members attention to the appendices; appendix 2 Members were advised focussed on the purchase of 104 units and provided an extensive explanation on the officers view that the acquisition, via the use of the Greater London Authority (GLA) funding and the HRA, was the best option. Members were requested to read and seriously consider the detail

provided within the appendix when making a decision on whether to purchase the homes.

Members were advised that the figures in relation to the overall spend on Fairfield Halls were incorrect within the report and the Interim Director advised that the breakdown of expenditure was; Fairfield Halls - £61.7 million, car park - £4.2 million, public realm - £3.2 million, and Fairfield homes - £4.2 million. The overall expenditure, it was stated, remained the same at £73.3 million. Members were further advised that the overall loan and interest owed to the council following accounting adjustments was £161,566,688 and that this figure included the £73.3 million spent on Fairfield Halls which was recommended to be reclassified as capital expenditure.

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Stuart King) stated that in principle he supported the recommendations but sought clarification in terms of the loan agreement, which he felt was desirable for both the council and Brick by Brick and would account for all monies loaned to the company. It was noted that the original agreements had assumed a debt/equity ratio of 75/25 which it was known had not been met. The Cabinet Member queried how the total loan for Fairfield Halls and wider Brick by Brick loans had been determined and what due diligence had been undertaken to ensure those values were correct. Further queries related to whether the Brick by Brick Directors accepted the allocations and what monitoring would be put in place to ensure the new consolidated loan was repaid. In terms of Members monitoring this work, the Cabinet Member queried how repayments would be reported to councillors. The Cabinet Member concluded by asking whether the external auditor had raised any concerns in relation to how the funds from Brick by Brick would be applied.

In response, the Interim Director confirmed that the consolidated loan term was for four years with the rationale being that should Cabinet agree to a full build out the building work and accounting work may not be concluded until 2025. It was confirmed that the Brick by Brick directors did agree to the consolidated figures and an agreement was due to be signed by the Chief Executive, following consultation with Cabinet Members, and the directors of Brick by Brick. Should a further drawdown be required, it was intended that this would be reported to the Shareholder Board which included Members and updates would be provided to councillors. In terms of the external auditors, the Interim Director advised that they had not expressed any concerns to him regarding repayments being used to repay accrued interest and then to repay the loan agreement.

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal queried the difference in terms of Fairfield Halls figures, with Brick by Brick accounts showing the figure at £76.4 million and the council publishing the amount as c. £69 million. The Interim Director advised the difference between the two figures was due to the way Brick by Brick treated accrued interest. Further queries were raised in terms of the minimum revenue provision (MRP)

implications on the council in terms of moving Fairfield Halls works from general budget to the capital programme. In response, the Interim Director advised that when the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was set earlier in the year a provision had been made for some of the Brick by Brick loans to be no longer paid off; including the loans for Fairfield Halls. As such, this had already been allowed for with the MRP and so there would not be an additional revenue budget cost.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance (Councillor Callton Young) was pleased to note that there had been no disputes with contractors but raised concerns in relation to the need for some accounts to be settled and that additional works were required at some sites. In response the Interim Executive Director Place (Sarah Hayward) advised that work was required in terms of the novation of contracts. Brick by Brick were working to settle all accounts with contractors ahead of novation, but Members were advised that the council would also ensure financial due diligence was undertaken which specialist surveyors would support to ensure the contracts had been discharged and that the work had been completed to a good quality. The Interim Executive Director advised that assurances could not be provided until surveys had concluded and the contracts novated, with the timescales for this work being clarified later that week.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance noted that the RIPI had included concerns as to the circular nature of funding and queried whether the council had properly explored the benefits and dis-benefits of purchasing the additional housing units. The Interim Director advised that he felt appendix 2 of the report clearly set out the benefits and dis-benefits of the options available to the council and further advised that it was for each Member to read the information provided and to reach their own conclusion as to whether the recommendation in the report was the correct course of action.

It was noted by the Cabinet Member that the information was technical and that Members needed to ensure it had received professional advice and assurance that the right option was being taken; as such he queried whether the details in appendix 2 of the report had been discussed with the external auditor. The Interim Director advised Members that the appendix had previously been a discussion paper between himself and the external auditor and that the only request had been to include the potential savings, of £400,000, to the general fund from not using temporary accommodation.

The Cabinet Member noted that the Interim Director had reference a potential tax liability and queried how the council would seek to minimise that risk. In response the Interim Director advised that the council had appointed tax advisors to support the work of the council, should it choose to sell Brick by Brick, to structure the sale in a legitimate tax efficient manner.

The Interim Chief Executive (Katherine Kerswell) advised Members that she had spoken with the external auditor, Sarah Ironmonger, in relation to the report and that Sarah had pressed upon the importance to clearly lay out the technical details; as had been done within appendix 2 of the report. The appendix sought to set out all of the pros and cons between two budget styles but it was stressed that external auditors would not state whether one course of action was correct or not. Additionally, it was noted that the council worked closely with the Improvement & Assurance Panel and Members were advised that they had been supporting the council on this piece of work. They had asked that Members to be mindful of the February 2021 report and that decisions were taken as being part of the whole approach to Brick by Brick.

The recommendation of an additional draw down of £10 million was noted by the Cabinet Member and confirmation was sought that this would be required for justifiable cash flow reasons and would be of benefit to the council. It was stressed by the Interim Director that he was hopeful that this provision would not be required and was included in the report should additional monies be required only.

It was noted by the Cabinet Member for Homes (Councillor Patricia Hay-Justice) that whilst the proposed purchase of homes was not sufficient it was a very welcome addition to the HRA as they would provide much needed homes for families.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning (Councillor Alisa Flemming) noted that paragraph 3.8 of the report included future intentions for some of the smaller sites and stressed that the council was ensuring that it was supporting its young people; in particular care leavers. To that end, the Cabinet Member queried whether supporting care leavers to have a home within the borough could be included as an option for future homes. In response, the Interim Chief Executive advised that this could be included in future discussions for the remaining sites.

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal raised concerns in relation to recommendation 1.4 of the report; especially in relation to delegating authority for the possible expenditure of millions of pounds and proposed that future decisions be brought back to Cabinet for consideration and decision. As such, he proposed an amendment to recommendation 1.4 to read:

*“To note that any recommendation to acquire further units or other assets from Brick by Brick, and that any such acquisition of units to be within existing capital budget provision and meet the affordability criteria, should return to Cabinet for decision.”*

This proposed amendment was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance and agreed by Cabinet.

The Leader of the Opposition (Councillor Jason Perry) raised concerns that the Opposition was being able to ask only one question and so were not able to hold the Administration to account. The Leader of the Opposition suggested that the meeting be adjourned and returned to on an alternative night to allow for further questions. In response, the Leader reminded the Leader of the Opposition that there was an Executive system in place and that it was local decision to involve the Shadow Cabinet in meetings, but that it was not a place for scrutiny. Opposition Members were advised that Scrutiny & Overview Committee or Council Question Time were the appropriate environments.

It was stated by the Leader of the Opposition that the Fairfield Halls refurbishment should have been at zero cost to the council was being accepted as costing taxpayers £73.3 million. Furthermore, it was stated that in February 2021 the Cabinet had agreed to a final £10 million loan to Brick by Brick, but it was noted that the report included a recommendation for a further £10 million. Concerns were raised that the HRA was being used to buy homes from the developer to bail it out and it was suggested that it would have been better for the council to have built the homes itself rather than through Brick by Brick. Whilst it was noted that consolidation of the loans was desirable, the overall cost to the council was £235 million and it was suggested by the Leader of the Opposition that the council had no control over the company and continued to fail. He queried how the Cabinet would justify those poor choices to the Croydon taxpayers.

In response the Leader of the Council stressed that her Administration were demonstrating that it was putting the situation right and that this demonstrated by the items being considered by Cabinet. It was further noted that a Value for Money investigation had been commissioned, the council was responding to the RIPI and the Croydon Renewal Programme was underway; all of which, the Leader stated, was putting Croydon on the right footing and would be of benefit to residents.

Fairfield Halls was noted by the Leader to be an extremely valuable community and cultural asset and the council was seeking to acquire more homes which were desperately needed by Croydon residents. It was stated that Scrutiny & Overview Committee would have an opportunity to review the decision, which it was felt appropriate.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED: To**

1. Agree that the Council recognises the costs of the Fairfield Halls refurbishment, being a total of £69.261 million (as identified in Appendix 1 of the report), as capital expenditure rather than as a Capital Loan and to:

- i. Agree, in principle, that the existing Fairfield Halls refurbishment contracts with Brick by Brick be novated to the Council (subject to review of the individual contracts, to be finalised and authorised by the Interim Executive Director of Place under their delegated authority); and
  - ii. Agree, in principle, that specialist consultants or contractors, required to identify any additional remedial works to the building, be appointed (in accordance with the Council's Tenders and Contracts Regulations).
2. Approve that the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) can acquire 104 residential units from Brick by Brick as set out in Appendix 2 of the report and as further detailed in the Part B restricted report.
3. Agree that the consolidated loan agreement shall, if required, be varied to include a further loan draw down amount of up to £10 million to cover additional working capital, in the event that this is required by Brick by Brick due to possible delays with forecast sales receipts (this is in addition to the £9.99m agreed by Cabinet in February 2021) and agree that authority be given to the Interim Chief Executive in consultation with the interim Director of Finance, Insurance and Risk and Section 151 officer and in consultation with the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal and Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance; to agree such draw down sums (not exceeding the overall additional £10m) as appropriate to address immediate operational needs.
4. To note that any recommendation to acquire further units or other assets from Brick by Brick, and that any such acquisition of units to be within existing capital budget provision and meet the affordability criteria, should return to Cabinet for decision.
5. Otherwise note the progress made with regard to the previous February 2021 Cabinet recommendations on Brick by Brick.

71/21

### **Libraries Public Consultation Phase Two - Options for cost savings in libraries provision in the borough**

The Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration (Councillor Oliver Lewis) noted that the last year had been a difficult time for Croydon and its libraries but stated that throughout that time the council had listened to residents and had tried to prevent library closures. To that end, the Cabinet Member was pleased to announce that the option to close libraries had been removed and that the report set out investment of £1.8 million of Community Infrastructure Levy monies in libraries, including a new library in South Norwood and investment in the libraries which were part the focus on the consultation.

Phase Two of the consultation included options of 21% reduction in hours across the service, an outsourcing model and a hybrid model. The full details on the options were set out in the report which asked Cabinet for approval to move to the next phase of the consultation.

It was highlighted by the Cabinet Member that a resident of Shirley, Andy Bebbington, had raised that the table within the appendix included the population of the ward the library was located but that libraries provided a service to more than one ward. Furthermore clarity was provided by the Cabinet Member that the £500,000 savings were required within 2022/23 financial year and not 2021/22, as set out in the report.

The Interim Executive Director Place (Sarah Hayward) highlighted that a huge amount of work had been undertaken by officers and residents to bring forward a report to go to the next phase of consultation.

It was noted by the Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery (Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed) that the report evidenced that the council had actively engaged with residents despite a period of national lockdown. It was highlighted that outsourcing the service would achieve the required savings, but not during the current financial year and questions were asked as to the implications of the options. Further questions were asked about community run libraries as it was noted that the feedback from residents of Broad Green was that the library was well used by the BAME community.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that should the council proceed with outsourcing the services through a partnership agreement then the full revenue savings would be achieved. In terms of community engagement, the Cabinet Member stressed that he hoped that the council could work closely with the communities in the borough; regardless of the final option agreed upon as it was recognised that there was a great amount of value of involving residents in the library service it was hoped that better outcomes for residents could be achieved.

It was noted by the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Stuart King) that the report set out that the preferred option, in terms of outsourcing, was a social enterprise or charitable organisation but sought clarification that commercial enterprises would be entitled to participate in the procurement process. Furthermore, the Cabinet Member raised concerns that the country was still operating under Covid-19 restrictions and queried whether this had been factored into future thinking; should libraries be required to close or the contractor went bankrupt.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration stated that should the council move to a procurement process for a partnership arrangement it would be an open process, but that he hoped that it would be an opportunity to demonstrate the Administration's values in the partnership and improved outcomes for residents. It was stressed that

there would not be a return to a contract like the Carillion library outsourcing which had been badly run.

In terms of planning for possible future restrictions or a contractor going bust, the Cabinet Member stated the council would be seeking assurances that any organisation looking to run the libraries was financially resilient. Furthermore, it was noted that the council would be commissioning a service and so should there be any closures due to restrictions the organisation would still be paid; irrespective of whether the service offered was virtual or face to face.

The Shadow Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration (Councillor Gareth Streeter) expressed disappointment that it appeared that the decision, which was due to be made by Cabinet, had already been made as it was reported that labour councillors had tweeted over the weekend in relation to the report. He further noted that there were three options being consulted; all of which would result in job losses. The Shadow Cabinet Member queried how many staff would lose their job or significant proportion of their income.

In response, the Cabinet Member stated that labour members had not been briefed but had read the published reports and were tweeting in response to the report. In terms of job losses, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the council would seek to minimise redundancies by not recruiting to vacant posts to reduce the impact on staff. The Cabinet Member concluded by thanking library staff for their hard work during the pandemic.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED:** To commence the second phase of public consultation on proposed changes to the Libraries service from the following options:

- Reduce service hours by 21% across the borough
- Outsource all libraries
- Hybrid – reduction in service hours (two days per week) to eight libraries and five community run libraries

72/21

### **Financial Performance Report - Period 11**

It was noted by the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Stuart King) that the report was the second monthly financial report to go to Cabinet and formed part of the increased financial rigour within the council to ensure Members were kept abreast of the finances of the authority. The report provided the situation in February 2021 and provided details of a confirmed overspend of £67.2 million which represented an improvement of almost £2 million since the previous report to Cabinet. The Cabinet Member noted that all of the movement was at a departmental budget level which was a positive step.

The use of the Spending Control Panel remained important and it was felt that the Panel was having a positive impact but that it was stressed that it was important that the council moved to challenging spend even where budgets exist to ensure where there was spend it was a necessary expenditure.

Members were informed that at section 3.1 of the report there was an error as it referred to when the Secretary of State may confirm the capitalisation direction whereas that confirmation had been received and approved and so the Section 114 Notice no longer applied.

The Cabinet Member for Resources & Financial Governance (Councillor Callton Young) noted that the Spending Control Panel was a good tool to manage spending more effectively but noted that the report did not provide a disaggregate of the figures. In response, the Interim Director of Finance, Investment & Risk (Chris Buss) confirmed that those figures would be provided in future reports. The Interim Director noted that of the risks identified in the report that the interest on the Brick by Brick loans would materialise, but that he did not envisage the rest coming to fruition and from having had early sight of the outturn he was hopeful that all the risks, including the additional money for Brick by Brick, would be manageable within the £70 million capitalisation direction.

The Shadow Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Jason Cummings) stated that this was a rare occasion where overspend had gone down from a previous report and was welcomed, but noted that the overspend remained over £67 million. It was further highlighted by the Shadow Cabinet Member that £400,000 of the almost £2 million improvement had come from over performance of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) and queries whether Cabinet Members were comfortable generating money from residents and businesses.

In response, the Cabinet Member confirmed that whilst the overspend had decreased the overall picture remained bleak. The Cabinet Member reflected that over 50% of PCNs were issued to drivers who lived outside the borough and so stressed that it was incorrect to suggest that the charges were impacting mainly residents. Furthermore, it was highlighted that there was an independent appeal process should a driver feel the PCN was not correctly issued, but that for over 80% of the appeals the council's case was being upheld. The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon (Councillor Muhammad Ali) added that there were clear policies in place, such as improving air quality for schemes where PCNs were issued.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

## **RESOLVED: To**

1. Note the net projected general fund financial overspend of **£67.2m** for the full year as at the end of Month 11, February 2021 which includes all projected COVID-19 related expenditure and income of **£40.9m**, a net decrease of **£1.9m** from Period 10, see section 3 of the report.
2. Note that a number of risks may materialise which have been previously reported which would see the variance increase. These include dividends and interest receivable from Brick By Brick (both historic accrued and in-year expectations) of **£20.6m**, and pending external audit verification of assumptions around 2019/20 accounting treatment of MRP and Transformation funding that could impact by **£6.0m**. Should all these risks which total **£26.6m** materialise, which is unlikely, the impact on the current forecast overspend of **£67.2m** is an increased overspend to **£93.8m**, with draft general fund reserves of just **£7.4m**.
3. Note, the above figures are predicated on forecasts from Month 10 to the year end and therefore could be subject to change. Forecasts are made based on the best available information at the time.
4. Note that the Spending Control Panel which was set up at the beginning of November 2020 continues to meet on a daily basis. Further details on the outputs of the SCP is provided within section 5 of the report.
5. Note that ELT are to continue to take further immediate action to mitigate spend during the remainder of the financial year, and work with their departments to ensure forecast figures are thoroughly reviewed.

73/21

## **Fees & Charges 2021/22**

The Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal (Councillor Stuart King) informed Cabinet that most increases detailed in the report were to cover inflation, with a couple being catch-up increases following a period of no change. It was noted that the last review had taken place in 2018 and good practice was to review fees and charges on an annual basis. In this regard, the Cabinet Member reflected that there were elements of poor practice within the council which had come to light as part of the review and were being addressed; such as ensuring charges covered overheads and not just direct costs. Furthermore, it was suggested that payment in advance should be the default position, where possible, to ensure the fees were collected before a service was delivered.

It was further stated by the Cabinet Member that improvements would be made in the residents experience; including the details of the fees and charges being more easily identifiable on the council's website.

It was noted that not all charges were included within the report; such as licensing charges would be considered by the Licensing Committee and that a further review was underway with a subsequent report to Cabinet due later in the municipal year.

The Cabinet Member for Sustainable Croydon (Councillor Muhammad Ali) queried whether benchmarking had taken place against other London councils. In response, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal confirmed the council was comparing its fees and charges compared to other councils. It was recognised that more benchmarking was required across the council and was only able to charge a fee which recovered the cost of the service and as such the proposed changes were only to recover costs and were not to generate profits. The Finance Consultant (Ian O'Donnell) confirmed that he had spoken to the responsible officers and that the majority were undertaking benchmarking exercises. Furthermore, he had undertaken a benchmarking review against those charges which were published on council's websites and following that exercise he was able to confirm that the council was broadly charging what other authorities were charging. It was reiterated that the law restricts the council from making a profit and the council could only charge up to the amount it cost to provide the service.

Concerns were raised by the Shadow Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery (Councillor Andy Stranack) that the proposed increases would impact the voluntary sector and noted that the charge to hire sport pitches was proposed to be increased by 15% which may lead to local football clubs suffering from financial difficulties. In response, the Cabinet Member for Croydon Renewal stated that it was difficult to understand why the Opposition felt that an elderly resident should subsidise activities such as a developer's street naming costs. It was reiterated that the charges were to recover costs only and suggested that those involved in using the Purley Way football pitch would understand that the charge was meet the full costs of using the pitch.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED: To**

1. To approve the fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 of the report;
2. Note that the charging policy for Adult Social Care has been amended with effect from 12 April 2021 under delegated authority as set out in paragraph 3.13 of the report;
3. To note that a report will be brought to Full Council reviewing the process and delegations for setting fees and charges;

4. To note that work is being undertaken to reconfigure the way fees and charges are presented on the council website so that they are presented in a user-friendly way that ensures they are easy to find in relation to each area of business and that enables customers to progress transactions easily;
5. To note that further increases to fees and charges will be brought forward for decision as proposals are developed; and
6. To have due regard to the equalities impact assessment at Appendix 2 of the report in making the decisions set out in these recommendations.

74/21

### **Croydon Renewal Community Engagement**

The Leader (Councillor Hamida Ali) noted that the report updated Members on work undertaken following discussions at the February 2021 Cabinet meeting; in particular in relation to the establishment of a Community Panel to support the delivery of the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan in addition to the work of the Improvement & Assurance Panel. The Community Panel sought to provide a facility to speak directly with residents to ensure the council was communicating widely on the work it was progressing and to hear residents' perspectives. It was reported that more outward reaching approaches to engaging with residents were proposed; with webinars which encouraged residents to share their views on the improvement work and to establish an online Citizens Panel to support the development of an ongoing relationship with residents.

The Interim Chief Executive (Katherine Kerswell) advised Members that the report should have included a reference to the considerable amount of engagement which takes place with children and young people in the borough and that the work on engaging in the public on the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan could feed into that engagement as it was recognised they were the future of the borough. The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning (Councillor Alisa Flemming) welcomed the Interim Chief Executive's comments and noted that the Choose Your Future platform may be a good option.

The Cabinet Member for Culture & Regeneration (Councillor Oliver Lewis) noted that it would be important to ensure the engagement work reached beyond the usual suspects and engaged with residents who did not ordinarily participate in those conversations. In response, the Leader stated that the intention of going beyond the proposals discussed in February was to ensure it was an open discussion with residents and engaged with more than the usual resident groups.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Safety & Business Recovery (Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed) further confirmed that the membership of the Citizen Panel would be an open process and that

panel members would need to be representative of the whole community of Croydon.

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED:** To

1. Agree the proposals for a series of resident webinars to provide information on the Croydon Renewal improvement plan, the actions being taken by the Council, and to answer questions and receive feedback from residents;
2. Note that a review is currently underway in relation to the Council's Get Involved platform, which supports consultation and engagement with residents;
3. Establish a Citizens e-Panel as detailed in paragraphs 5.10 - 5.15 of the report to form a representatives and retained sample of residents to inform Council decision making as part of the Croydon Renewal Plan; and
4. Authorise the Interim Chief Executive to finalise the arrangements for a Citizens e-Panel, including terms of reference and membership, and undertake Equality Impact Assessment and complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment, prior to implementation, as necessary.

75/21

**Stage 1: Recommendations arising from Scrutiny**

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED:** To receive the recommendations arising from meeting of the Scrutiny & Overview Committee held on 30 March 2021 and the Children & Young People Sub-Committee held on 20 April 2021, and to provide a substantive response within two months (i.e. at the next available Cabinet meeting on **5 July 2021**).

76/21

**Stage 2: Response to Recommendations arising from Scrutiny & Overview Committee held on 16 February 2021**

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED:** To approve the response and action plans attached to the report at Appendix A and that these be reported to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee or relevant Sub-Committees.

77/21

### **Investing in our Borough**

The Leader of the Council delegated authority to the Cabinet to make the following decisions:

**RESOLVED:** To note

1. The contracts between £500,000 and £5,000,000 anticipated to be awarded under delegated authority from the Leader by the nominated Cabinet Member, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and Financial Governance and with the Leader in certain circumstances, before the next meeting of Cabinet, as set out in section 5.1.1 of the report; and
2. The list of delegated award decisions made by the Director of Commissioning and Procurement, between 17/03/2021 – 06/04/2021, as set out in section 5.1.2 of the report.

78/21

### **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

This item was not required.

79/21

### **Ongoing Review of Brick by Brick Croydon Ltd and associated matters relating to the company**

The discussion of the report and decisions were held in Part A (minute reference 70/21).

The meeting ended at 9.28 pm