

**COUNCIL MEETING**

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2021**

**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR ORAL REPLY**

Written replies were provided for the questions dealt with in the time allowed at the meeting –

**9. From Cllr Kieran Terry to the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management**

What can be learned from the submission of a section 114 notice by neighbouring Croydon Council last year, which effectively declared the Labour-run authority to be bankrupt? How has Bromley acted differently over recent years to avoid encountering a similar situation?

**Reply:**

I believe it is always possible to learn more from the failure of others rather than their successes.

Key strengths of Bromley includes, for example, forward financial planning, robust financial management and never forgetting the requirement for the Council to 'live within its means' ensuring we spend public money wisely.

By way of contrast, let me highlight the following:-

- We have had not received any adverse commentary from external auditors on financial sustainability. Croydon have received adverse comments as follows – For the 2017/18 accounts Grant Thornton first raised concerns around financial sustainability with recommendations made within the VFM conclusion for corrective action. For 2018/19 Grant Thornton qualified their VFM conclusion with concerns'.
- We have adequate levels of combined general and earmarked reserves across which are significantly higher than Croydon's previously reported reserves of £16.6m as at 31/3/20;
- We currently have sufficient contingency (central contingency sum) to meet the any short term issues re Covid pandemic without requiring any drawdown of balances this year/ Croydon have sought a capitalisation directive from Government, which is permission to borrow to meet funding shortfalls;
- Our latest budget monitoring report shows that we are within budget - no overspends overall. Croydon face a significant overspend and Croydon's Public Interest report refers to a residual budget gap for 2020/21 estimated at £65.4m, exceeding available reserves of £16.6m;
- Bromley has had no overall overspend for some years - Croydon's Public Interest report refers to the Council failing to address the underlying causes of



service overspends which during 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 had a combined overspend of £59.3 million;

- We remain 'debt free' which reduces the financial risk around cost impact of increases in interest rates. Croydon have reported debt of over £1.5bn and Grant Thornton estimate that Croydon's debt will rise to £1.8bn by the end of 2020/21 and exceed £2bn by 2022/23.

We spend public money wisely. It is worth noting that Croydon Croydon's settlement funding per head of population is £222.11 for 2019/20 which compares with £112.61 for Bromley – nearly double. That can't be right.

#### **10. From Cllr Tony Owen to the Leader of the Council**

How much does membership of London Councils cost Bromley taxpayers?

**Reply:**

Membership in 2020/21 cost £161,958.

In addition, the Council was required to make a payment of £247,844 towards the London Boroughs Grant Scheme.

Bromley is also charged £33,459 by the Parking Enforcement & Appeals Service and £6,492 by Taxicard Administration.

#### **11. From Cllr Angela Wilkins to the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Community Services**

What actions is he proposing to reduce excessive traffic caused by rat-running on residential roads in Crystal Palace and why has he been silent on the recent Crystal Palace LTN implemented (and recently removed) by LB Croydon?

**Reply:**

I don't think that excessive traffic is caused by what you refer to as rat running and the Council has been far from silent on the matter of Croydon's LTN. Croydon's apparent attempt to help residents in their LTN area to achieve a less trafficked environment to encourage walking and cycling has in fact had a very detrimental impact on many residents. Those living in some adjacent residential roads on Bromley's side of the boundary have had to contend with vastly increased traffic flows on their narrow and now-congested streets. Bromley residents living on Anerley Hill also had to contend with longer queues of traffic while Croydon's LTN was in place, with the resulting negative impact on air quality.

For the avoidance of doubt, as a cross borough issue residents and members involved the Leader early on and the Leader naturally responded. Now Croydon is actually consulting Bromley on this scheme, I as PH have been involved in responses. This arrangement should not be taken as a divergence of views, just that in these unprecedented times we are avoiding duplication of effort.



**12. From Cllr Josh King to the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Community Services**

Can the Portfolio Holder explain why it has taken such a long time to clear the drain blockage at Birkbeck Bridge – I made a report on fix my street in August 2020 and the initial response was that it was a Thames Water issue.

**Reply:**

We were made aware of, subsequently investigated extensively and successfully managed to resolve the issue referred to, however these types of complicated enquiries can become drawn out given the variable nature of drainage which at times is due to multiple factors and responsibilities split across varying parties. Certain time frames and responses could have been tightened and improved, and this is a matter we are addressing.

**13. From Cllr Ian Dunn to the Portfolio Holder for Renewal, Recreation & Housing**

Can the Portfolio Holder please explain what the Council is doing to support MyTime, while its premises are closed down during Lockdown?

**Reply:**

Council officers have been meeting regularly with Mytime to monitor the situation. The Council has agreed rental deferments along with other leases and continues to review this. Any further support will be subject to Executive scrutiny. The Council supported Mytime in applying for the National Leisure Recovery Fund Grant. Notification has just been received that this application has been successful with an award of £760K. Once received this will be passported to Mytime to support the hibernation costs incurred during lockdown. The Council will work with Mytime to apply for any further grant funding which may be made available to support leisure services.

**14. From Cllr Simon Jeal to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health**

What action is taken by Council officers in the event of a breach of COVID restrictions by people working or acting for council contractors - particularly where they are engaged in activity which put them into contact with vulnerable residents?

**Reply:**

In the event of the Council being notified of any such breach of restrictions, contractors would be contacted to ensure greater compliance by their employees in the future. Support would be offered to ensure that all staff have been trained and that appropriate use is being made of PPE and other infection control processes.



## **15. From Cllr Kevin Brooks to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health**

Please explain what the Council is doing to support Care Homes across the Borough which are struggling and currently suffering high levels of COVID infection.

### **Reply:**

Fortunately due to the proactive stance and response to the pandemic taken by this Council and thanks in large part to the excellent management by their staff there are no care homes across the Borough struggling or suffering high levels of Covid at the current time.

In terms of support:

The Director for Adult Services and the Director for Public Health have put in place regular meetings where Covid-19 cases and outbreaks (2 Residents) are closely monitored.

In the event of an outbreak a tailored support plan is put in place to help the care home and its residents. Support can include:

- Additional PPE
- Extra support and guidance for providers on testing for staff and residents
- Advice and guidance and training from the Public Health team
- Wellbeing support for providers
- Regular meetings with providers to support the management of the outbreak and co-ordinate the response.
- Extra funds to cover costs of additional Infection Prevention and Control requirements and additional staff cover

Covid positive patients being discharged from hospital to a care home will temporarily stay at one of two designated homes with specialist facilities to support their recovery before moving on to their permanent care home.

In a poll taken at the January meeting of the Bromley Care Home Managers Forum providers reported high levels of satisfaction in the support they have received over Covid infection prevention and control.