

This is an incredibly frustrating situation that has arisen through decisions made under the previous administration, relating to the procurement of the contract for the supply of new bus shelters with digital advertising screens.

The contract was procured in 2020 and a concession contract was awarded in November 2021. However, a decision was taken at that time to allow the removal of all existing bus shelters well in advance of new shelters being delivered. As the questioner rightly says, this has left residents facing a third winter without shelter.

Following the May 2022 elections, the Executive Mayor arranged a meeting with the CEO of Smart City (Valo) to try to get to the bottom of the issue and was given a commitment that they would install the first 37 bus shelters by November 2022. However, the planned installation did not materialise.

As a result, council officers have undertaken a range of actions since then to try to get Valo to deliver on the contract, including issuing two default notices earlier this year, but to no avail. We have now terminated the contract and will be considering all options available to the Council including pursuing Valo for damages for their failure to deliver on the contract.

Clearly this is a very unsatisfactory position, and we have to reflect on how past decisions allowed a contractor who had no track record of delivering a contract like this in the UK to win it, and why the existing bus shelters were allowed to be removed before the new contractor was in a position to replace them. We have asked officers to prioritise moving forward to secure alternative arrangements for getting bus shelters back in the borough as soon as possible and they have been working at pace to find alternative ways of doing this. More recently, they have been in discussions with Transport for London (TfL) to determine if they have capacity to assist. Discussions are still underway, but we are hopeful that this is viable, and the plan is that new bus shelters will be in place at key locations next year.

Elianne Andam's murder was a devastating loss for our community and it is right that the Council, Police, community partners and others reflect on what more we can be doing to tackle the scourge of knife crime on our streets, particularly where women and girls are involved.

Making Croydon safer is one of the key goals of Mayor Perry's administration, and since coming into office I have worked with our partners and communities to address the priorities that really matter - tackling violence against women and girls, making Croydon safer for young people, and addressing anti-social behaviour hotspots across the borough. We've done this by focussing on delivery plans that make a real difference, implementing real change on the ground - such as through our PSPOs, investing in local community groups to work with young people at risk, improving how we tackle anti-social behaviour, and most importantly preserving the budget and funding for the Family Justice Service and making sure that victims have access to quality support when they need it, including in Police Stations and hospitals.

We know that certain crimes disproportionately affect women and girls, manifesting themselves in different ways, and demand targeted solutions. Following the Mayor's pledge in 2022, we are developing a Tackling Violence Against Women & Girls (VAWG) Delivery Plan Strategy which will go to Cabinet in Spring 2024.

This will build on our commitment to having Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) in public spaces including hospitals, Police Stations and community buildings in Croydon. We will also work with perpetrators through the rehabilitative Croydon DRIVE Project to help them to end their abusive behaviour. More broadly the new Public Space Protection Order in place in the town centre, has given police greater powers to tackle anti-social behaviour and create a safer environment in the area. A new PSPO will be in place in Thornton Heath in the early part of next year. We are also working with Croydon's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic domestic abuse partnership forum, which provides a safe space for VAWG practitioners, advocates, grassroots activists and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence services to work together.

Last month the council secured £165,000 through the government's Safer Streets Fund to tackle crime in the town centre which will be used for projects aimed to reduce personal robberies, knife crime and violence in the town centre with a focus on intervention for girls.

The programme will deliver sessions with young women and will also focus on personal safety.

We have commissioned through Safer Streets Funding VCS organisations to deliver female outreach work in the Town Centre. We will also shortly run a programme in schools which will educate young people on healthy relationships and preventing gender-based violence.

Thank you for your question about the business status of Regen Capital during the negotiations for Red Clover Gardens.

It is perfectly normal for organisations to create a dormant business with low issued capital for the purpose of negotiating property deals such as this. Indeed, it is perceived as good practice for a new commercial project that the developer to create a new company for any new business venture.

Not only does it make the accounting clearer, it limits the liability for the project to the new company and in some cases delivers tax efficiencies to the project.

Due diligence conducted by the seller will check the track records of the people involved in such business vehicles, and when negotiations are complete the final documentation will set out in clear terms the commercial relationships between purchaser, funder and lease holder.

The Council is fully aware of the importance of sensible parking policies for the wellbeing and prosperity of Croydon. We have recently completed a major consultation on our draft parking policy. The results of this are being considered, but I can reassure you that the new policy is aimed at making parking easier, fairer, more accessible, and efficient for people visiting Croydon's high streets and town centres. In this way it will support the Borough's revitalisation and long-term regeneration.

Turning to your specific questions.

The maximum free period for parking in district and local centres could be reduced depending on the outcome of the consultation. Reducing the maximum free period from 1 hour to 30 minutes would increase the turn-over of parking spaces and reduce the number of drivers obtaining multiple 1-hour tickets.

The recent pilot in South Croydon showed reduced meter feeding and as a result a higher turnover of cars meaning more people able to visit local businesses.

Whilst I appreciate it is a different way of working, parking by phone reduces the need for on-street Pay & Display machines and maintenance and upgrade costs to the Council. For many residents, using mobile phones is also a convenient way to pay for parking and set reminders of expiry times. It is also worth noting that the planned switch off of 3G networks will mean that some pay and display machines will cease to work in the future.

Unlike other London boroughs we are also looking at the use of PpayP point to ensure residents have alternative ways to pay.

On hours of control, we have not yet reached a decision on altering the times of parking controls.

Thank you for your question, as a major gateway for our borough, the state of East Croydon is an important issue for many of our residents and visitors.

The council is aware of the issues described in your question and have been taking steps with partners in order to address the behaviour.

We are working in partnership with the local Policing team, Croydon Reach, who aid rough sleepers, and Change, Grow, Live, who provide intervention for substance and alcohol misuse, to try to assist the individuals you have identified to access services in order to address their needs.

If individuals choose not to engage with services, whilst the offer to support will remain, we will also explore enforcement action to prevent any anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour from taking place where relevant.

Whilst our primary aim is to support those who are living rough on our streets, some of the behaviour described, for example, drug taking are of course a criminal offence. The local Policing team have a particular focus on the area as part of their regular patrols in an effort to crack down on drug offences and wider anti-social behaviour. The Town Centre Public Space Protection Order has also helped by giving the police greater powers to intervene where anti-social behaviour is taking place.

I appreciate this is not a fast process which frustrates me as much as it does you. However, we will continue to work with our partners in order to resolve the ongoing issues you have described.

Thank you for raising this very positive suggestion. I would be delighted if the line were to be named after a Croydon icon. I will happily write to the Mayor of London supporting the proposal and I would encourage residents across the borough to do similarly.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor is an inspirational figure and it is a fitting suggestion for the line to be named for to recognise his exceptional musical talent, and pioneering anti racism work and legacy

The Croydon Music Heritage Trail app has been downloaded 458 times and seen 107K engagements with content since launching in June 2023.

The app is part of a wider project celebrating Croydon's Music Heritage including a new exhibition scheduled to open at Museum of Croydon in Feb 24, walking tours, a programme of oral history collecting, a mural in Queens Gardens and an education programme including new learning resources for primary and secondary school children to learn more about Croydon's music in school or through visits to the Museum. Early 2024 will see a renewed focus on music heritage including further promotion of the app and the trail will take place as part of the music heritage programme alongside the exhibition launch.

The project is being funded through grant funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, the Mayor of London and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.