

Public Questions – 11th December 2024

1. There has been a marked increase in the anti-social behaviour in the Addiscombe West area since the implementation of a PSPO order around the town centre. On a daily basis residents witness drug deals being openly done. The addicts then sit on garden walls, doorsteps and the alleys between houses to take drugs. They can be verbally abusive if challenged. I have phoned police only to be told there are no cars available - I was not given a CAD number. What further action are the authorities taking to improve this situation and make the area safer.

Response

The Council and key partners are aware of the issues regarding drug use and ongoing anti-social behaviour in your area. I recently convened a walkabout with ward councillors - Cllr Hay-Justice and Cllr Sutton joined us as well, we were joined by some residents and council officers to explore what more can be done.

The behaviours reported in these areas are mainly related to drug use and we do not believe that there has been displacement from the Town Centre as a result of PSPO enforcement. We believe the move to residential areas has occurred owing to the presence of abandoned buildings which we are also looking into. The behaviour taking place is also of a criminal nature that would need to be enforced through other Policing powers outside of a public safety protection order.

In relation to the availability of police cars, I would suggest that you contact the police on that issue but as a local authority we are always actively seeking additional Police resources for our borough.

I absolutely understand your concerns as a resident, and we are working with our key partners to address the issues you have raised.

We are tasking Change Grow Live (our substance misuse service) to attend the hotspot locations to provide assistance to the individuals identified. We are also working with the Local Policing team to tackle drug dealing and target offenders who cause anti-social behaviour in public spaces. We are in the process of upgrading the council's CCTV network which should give us deployable cameras for locations such as the ones you have raised this evening.

Furthermore, we have introduced a Town Centre task force that brings together various agencies to address hotspot areas in the town centre and surrounding areas and the issues you have raised are important to us and we will continue to do all that we can to address them. Thank you.

2. What steps has the Mayor taken to ensure that squatters, persistent noise disturbances, drug activity and anti-social behaviour are addressed immediately they are reported and what assurances can be given to Croydon residents facing these situations that they will not be continually ignored?

Response

When a property has been identified with squatters, we are proactively contacting the property owner to ensure that they take appropriate steps to secure the premises and surrounding areas. We also deploy our supporting partners such as Croydon Reach (who aid rough sleepers) Change, Grow, Live (who provide intervention for substance and alcohol misuse) to the area to engage with the individuals in order to provide support to them. It is essential that we offer support and advice to the individuals so that they can access services and access accommodation.

Croydon in partnership with our key partners have established a ten-year Drugs Strategy with the purpose of reducing crime and saving lives by reducing the supply and demand for drugs and continuing to deliver a high-quality treatment and recovery system. As a result, CGL are often deployed to areas where we have received reports of public drug use and/or street drinking.

As a result, we implemented the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in the Town Centre as well as Thornton Heath and the surrounding areas. We have also set up a new taskforce to make Croydon's town centre cleaner and safer for everyone. The taskforce is made up of key statutory, community and voluntary sector organisations in the borough, who will work together to clean up hotspot areas and deal with antisocial behaviour. It includes the council, local businesses, police, children's and youth engagement services, the community, voluntary and health sectors, and homeless and rough sleepers' outreach support teams. They are working in partnership to gather intelligence and swiftly act on concerns about antisocial behaviour in the town centre to ensure residents, businesses and people in the borough can feel safe.

3. Has the Council received the police report back regarding Croydon Council mismanagement of the finances? If so, what action is the police taking? Also, if there was any criminal investigation from the police report will the Council go through the proceeds of crime to retrieve money back?

Response

Yes, the Met Police have reported back following the decision of the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee in March 2023 to refer a suite of reports on historical financial mismanagement, including the independent Penn and Kroll reports, for them to consider. The review conducted by the Met Police was lengthy and thorough and involved the CPS too. The Met Police found potential wrongdoing, breaches of statutory duty and incompetence. However these were found to be collective failings rather than individual. The Met Police concluded that there is no further action they can take at this stage. In fact, the decision of the Met Police was reported back to the

committee (which I chair) only two days ago on 9 December 2024 and further details have been published on the Council's website.

The committee were unanimous that the current powers to prosecute individuals in public office for serious failures and breaches of statutory duty is inadequate. The Committee feel strongly that the law needs to change so that individuals can be held accountable for failings.

The committee members who met on Monday (9 December), were deeply disappointed with the outcome. We have committed to lobby the government on this issue on behalf of Croydon's residents, who continue to suffer the consequences of the financial mismanagement and governance failures of the past and we will be lobbying government for a change in the law.

As we are now able to do so, the committee also agreed that the Kroll report should be published – in the same way that all previous reports have been – so that Croydon residents can fully understand the background to the council's financial collapse in 2020. The Kroll report was an independent review into the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls.

The Council will also resume its work on making referrals to professional bodies, which were paused pending the outcome of the Met Police review.

As one of only two members who voted against the financial settlement with Croydon's former CEO, I'm hugely disappointed that we can no longer take further action within the existing laws, for holding to account those people who damaged Croydon so badly.

Residents have, quite rightly, been very angry over this. I share that anger. This highlights a serious gap in the law, and we are calling for change so it cannot happen to other local authorities.

4. The Fairfield Halls, one of the largest arts venues in South London has hosted high profile names including the Beatles, Morecambe and Wise to Level 42 and Jimmy Carr. Movies including The Da Vinci Code were filmed there.

What about local groups using the Fairfield Halls? A music school is leaving, a resident chamber orchestra is not playing frequently, a local community choir has moved, and a small theatre company closed after 23 years.

Can the Council investigate returning the Fairfield Halls back into local control? It could serve its community fully as well as being a high-profile arts venue.

Response

The council is committed to seeing Fairfield Halls thrive as a centre of arts, culture, events and community usage in the centre of Croydon. It was a key venue for many successful events during the London Borough of Culture and continues to deliver many quality shows and performances.

It was great to join the Croydon School Music and Arts Celebration last week for their festive celebration. The Halls were full of primary school children from Schools across Croydon celebrating Christmas, Diwali and Hanukkah.

For Fairfield to succeed as a cultural centre for Croydon, it must be financially viable. Prior to the current arrangement the Council was providing a significant annual subsidy to run Fairfield Halls through a trust. Returning to a local authority trust model would require a similar annual cash subsidy, and this is not possible given the council's current financial challenges following the mismanagement of the previous Council.

We continue to work with the operators BHLive, and the resident companies such as Talawa and the London Mozart Players, to make Fairfield the best possible cultural centre for Croydon. We are keen to expand the community offer, and will keep working with BHLive to expand this in a financially sustainable way.