Latest News

Since my last update, we have had two Cabinet meetings. At the Cabinet meeting in February, we recommended a budget to Council that keeps council tax affordable for residents while we protect front line services in Croydon. Both February and March’s Cabinet agendas considered reports that had a strong focus on protecting our services and supporting our residents. From a completely new Credit Union offer to hearing the recommendations of the opportunity and fairness commission, we continue to match our ambitious programme for Croydon with ensuring that we deliver high quality public services in the Borough for all of our residents.

We have also had the fantastic news that we have reached a final agreement with Fairfield (Croydon) Ltd to work together on a managed programme that will see the venue temporarily close on 15 July 2016 in preparation for a £30m transformation. The agreement means that as we take this once-in-a-generation opportunity to totally transform Fairfield Halls into one of the most prestigious arts and entertainment venues in the country, we have also ensured that the Board is able to ensure everyone who works there is treated fairly and properly.

Having put arts and culture at the heart of Croydon’s regeneration, I’m delighted to report that the second Croydon Beer Festival, hosted in the Town Hall and Clocktower complex, was a fantastic success with every night sold out. I am also delighted that Boxpark will be partnering the Council in delivering this year’s ambition festival and that the rooftop cinema will also be returning to Croydon this summer. We continue to deliver our ambitious agenda for Croydon and this past month has seen the opening of an opinion survey on a second 20mph zone in north east Croydon, the Council winning a national award for leading a regional programme to innovate services for children with special educational needs, two more fly-tipping vehicles seized and fly-tippers arrested and Croydon achieving its growth zone deal with the GLA and the Government – a deal that will deliver a £350m programme of investment in the metropolitan centre.

As I write, I would also like to place on record my thanks to two people leaving Croydon. I’m hugely grateful to Councillor Emily Benn for all her hard work in so ably representing the residents of West Thornton and for her work supporting the armed forces in Croydon. I’m sure that everyone will join me in wishing her well as her career now takes her overseas.

Likewise, after twelve years at Croydon, Nathan Elvery has announced his intention to resign and to move onto pastures new in West Sussex. I thank Nathan for everything that he has
done for Croydon in all of his roles for the council in helping shape, transform and improve our public services and wish him all the best as he takes up his new role – I’m certain we will have several good opportunities to thank him more fully over the coming weeks.

Delivering our Ambitions

The Cabinet meeting on 29 February primarily focussed on recommending a budget to Council. I’ve been clear that we are working hard to ensure that this Council is on the side of Croydon residents, so I’m delighted that before we recommended a budget, we first gave consideration to the recommendations of the Opportunity and Fairness Commission and also to the second phase of our Gateway programme.

The final report of the Commission highlighted the key inequality and fairness challenges for the borough and presented recommendations on how these can be addressed by the Council and our statutory, voluntary and community sector partners.

Building on the success of our Gateway programme in improving outcomes for vulnerable households, the phase two report detailed plans for how we will further improve outcomes for residents by broadening the “gateway” whole family, holistic, early intervention and prevention focused approaches across a range of services within adult social care, supported housing and early intervention and children’s social care services.

Both of these reports look at how we deliver services to those residents most in need and I’m glad that the budget was considered in the context of not just the savings that the Council needs to make, but also in the context of the aspirations we have for the services we deliver.

In that context, the Cabinet recommended a budget to Council that reflects the clear priorities of the administration. This was particularly clear on reducing back office costs and protecting the front line and those services that matter most to residents.

The February meeting also considered a report on the 9th meeting of Croydon Congress held on 26 November 2015, ‘Child Sexual Exploitation: Can you see it? Can you help stop it?’ This very powerful meeting of the congress helped raise awareness and change attitudes and behaviours of people and organisations in the borough and looked to better equip the community to take an active role with the issue.

The March meeting of Cabinet also focussed on how the Council can do more with less to support our residents.
The first report Cabinet detailed how the council is working with Croydon Credit Union to help tackle the cost of living crisis and, very specifically, to support Croydon’s Credit Union as a people’s bank and a financial co-operative open to all. Under this administration, the Council has actively worked with and supported Croydon’s Credit Union as a people’s bank and an independent financial co-operative open to all. This initiative expands the Credit Union’s services, providing sustainable loans linked to membership of the Union and a commitment to save in the longer term. The work will assist to provide an alternative to payday loan companies, which are causing great harm in our communities.

The Cabinet then agreed to consult on a new Housing Allocations scheme. This administration is determined to continue to tackle homelessness in Croydon and this report set out our strategy to tackle the number of households in temporary accommodation, and how we will consult on some proposed amendments to Croydon’s Housing Allocations Scheme to support this approach.

The next two reports looked at how we can make better use of valued community services in the context of both diminishing resources but, perhaps more significantly, a changing world.

The first report agreed to undertake an engagement exercise with residents on how the Borough’s libraries can best serve them and their communities in the future. Our libraries are much loved, and I know that different communities may want different things from their libraries in the future. This engagement exercise is to hear what role local residents feel the library in their area should play as we put together a strategy for Croydon’s libraries that is fit for the 21st century. Please do have your say by visiting https://getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk/KMS/DMart.aspx.

The second report takes a similar approach to Croydon’s parks and open spaces. The Cabinet agreed to engage with residents to hear more about how residents feel they can get more enjoyment and benefit from their parks and green spaces in their local areas. The big conversation on our parks will begin in the summer, so please do take the chance to have your say.

The March meeting of Cabinet also agreed a paper that set out a different strategy for how the Council commissions contracts for services. Our new strategy is aligned with the recommendations of the opportunity and fairness commission, helping to ensure that not only the services we commission but also how we commission them, will deliver greater value to Croydon overall.