
CQ196- 13 from Councillor Pat Ryan

LE

Should this present Coalition Government decide to abolish or reduce the winter fuel allowance, and the Freedom pass, would the Leader of this Council and his Conservative Group, join together with the Labour Group in openly and vigorously opposing such measures.

Reply

Thank you for your question, though it is a mixture of scaremongering and rank hypocrisy.

I'll start with the scaremongering; the Prime Minister made it clear in January that there are absolutely no plans to touch the winter fuel allowance. It was widely reported in the press so I'm surprised that you didn't pick it up.

Addressing the rank hypocrisy, I'll remind you that the previous Labour government introduced the age escalator for the freedom pass, which started reducing the number of people that were entitled to join the scheme from April 2010. Fortunately, the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has protected Londoners from Labour's mismanagement of the freedom pass by introducing the 60+ concessionary travel scheme last year.

Perhaps Councillor Ryan can remind us all of what he and his colleagues did to 'openly and vigorously' oppose the Labour cuts to the freedom pass or in the alternative I invite him to congratulate Mayor Johnson for protecting Londoners from those cuts?

CQ201- 13 from Councillor Manju Shahul-Hameed

LE

Many residents of Broad Green and the neighbouring wards are still not aware of the incinerator proposal in Beddington Lane. Can the leader list the consultation events and the public meetings organised by the Council and how many responses were received as a result of the consultation and what was the total cost of organising these events?

Reply

First round of exhibitions.

All the exhibitions ran from 3pm-7pm and were held at the following venues:

Tuesday 20 March - Holiday Inn, Gibson Road, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 2RF
32 attendees

Wednesday 21 March - Bedzed Pavilion, Sandmartin Way, Hackbridge, Wallington, Surrey, SM6 7DF
33 attendees

Friday 23 March - The Vestry Hall, London Road, Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 3UD
21 attendees

Monday 26 March - Croydon Central Library, Katharine Street, London, CR9 1ET
61 attendees

Tuesday 27 March - Richard Mayo Hall, Kingston United Reformed Church, Eden Street, Kingston, KT1 1HZ
8 attendees

Second round of exhibitions.

The information events took place as follows:

Tuesday 22 May, 1-5.30pm - The Community Room, Thornton Heath Library, 190 Brigstock Road, Thornton Heath, CR7 7JB
3 attendees

Wednesday 23 May, 4-8pm - Bedzed Pavilion, Sandmartin Way, Hackbridge, Wallington, Surrey SM6 7DF
22 attendees

Thursday 24 May, 4-8pm - The Winston Room, Beddington Conference Centre, Brandon House, Marlowe Way, Croydon, CR0 4XS
11 attendees

All costs associated with the organisation and delivery of these public consultation events were funded wholly by Viridor.

CQ215- 13 from Councillor Terry Lenton

LE

I am so tired of hearing assertions from the Minority Group about the various amounts they think Bernard Weatherill House is costing Croydon's council tax payers. Can the Leader please explain why it is that Minority Group Members are unable to back up their assertions?

Reply

Thank you for raising this point. Elsewhere in the Council Questions for tonight's meeting you will hear even more of the Labour scaremongering and talking Croydon down. Unfortunately, even when the economics are plain and simple to see, we continue to hear the Labour party trying to scare voters even when their position is so plainly contrary to the facts.

The business case for Bernard Weatherill House is very straightforward – it is a cost efficient solution to the problem of providing suitable accommodation for staff and contact facilities for residents and strategic partners including:

- NHS – Clinical Commissioning Unit
- NHS – OT & Equipment
- Croydon Health Services
- Credit Union
- Metropolitan Police
- London Sports Partnership
- Multi Agency Service Hub (MASH)
- South West London Partnership
- Job Centre Plus
- Citizens Advice Bureau

Some of the above partners will occupy space in Access Croydon only on a part time basis, not office floors.

The Labour Members know the costs associated with the build of Bernard Weatherill House have had no impact on the council's budget and therefore the Council Tax payer, yet they insist on banding around various figures for how much it will cost tax payers.

In fact, a reserve is being built up on the council's balance sheet to offset the long term costs. Savings from the council's asset rationalisation programme which are already estimated at £2m per year by 2015, receipts from asset disposals and profits made by CCURV will all contribute to covering the costs. The new building will also provide annual revenue savings by reducing the Council's overall office footprint, reduced building running costs and reduced energy costs, thus helping the Council to protect frontline services.

Of course, the reason why the Labour Party cannot backup their assertions is because their alternative is a significantly more expensive short term fix. The previous Labour administration had already spent £7.5m on renting properties, decanting staff and services and buying furniture and fittings for Taberner House, and

they still had no solution to the medium and long term accommodation needs of the Council. Since losing power, it has emerged that the retrospective Labour plan would have been to spend even more on Taberner House.

We know that BWH will only have a positive impact on the Council's budget. In sharp contrast, let's remind ourselves of just how much taxpayers' money a Labour administration would have wasted:

Having already spent £7.5m we need to add the following:-

A refurbish of Taberner House (life expectancy 10 years)	£40.000m
Cost of moving staff out to do this and of course back in	£ 0.600m
Cost of temporary accommodation for moved staff	£ 5.000m
Furniture, Fittings and Equipment	£ 4.000m
Total	£57.100m

Remember this option was for 10 years, so 10 years later the need to do it all again, with all cost inflated by 20% based on average 2% RPI per annum

A refurbish of Taberner House (life expectancy 10 years)	£48.000m
Cost of moving staff out to do this and of course back in	£ 0.720m
Cost of temporary accommodation for moved staff	£ 6.000m
Furniture, Fittings and Equipment	£ 4.800m
Total	£59.520m

20 year Total Cost Comparison **£116.620m**

So under a Labour administration they would have spend £116.620m to remain in Taberner House.

All accommodation savings over the period would not have been achieved - £1.5m per annum, so £30m over 20 years, energy efficiency savings would also not have been achieved so a further £8m of benefit lost to our taxpayers. Therefore a grand total of £38m of lost benefit to our taxpayers.

All in all a total cost of **£154.62m** to the taxpayer, huge service disruption and of course no regeneration benefit at all in the borough.

It is in sharp contrast to Labour's planned total spend of £154.62m, that while Bernard Weatherill House will cost £121.5m to build, this administration is funding that cost through the innovate CCURV partnership and protecting taxpayers and frontline services.

When the people of Croydon are called to the ballot box in 2014, they will remember that poor financial management is just one of many reasons why Labour always hike up Council Tax, and if there is still any doubt, just take a look at how much Labour Councils have spent on office accommodation in Newham, Brent and Southwark.

CQ230- 13 from Councillor Donald Speakman

LE

Will the Leader please ensure Croydon’s residents are fully aware of the lax and indifferent attitude Labour Councillors have towards spending their hard earned cash. This attitude is illustrated by reference to Labour’s crippling Council tax increases of 35.73% -1995 and 26.84% - 2003

Reply

Thank you for your question.

Of course, it is right that we remember just what a perilous state Croydon’s finances were in when residents voted Labour out of office in 2006. This Council was all but bust – no proper financial planning, spending out of control and the reserves all but empty. Unfortunately the Labour party only ever had one answer, and that was to take more from the pockets of hard working council tax payers.

The table below shows just how much and how often Labour punished Croydon residents:

	Year	Band D £	Increase %	Cumulative Increase	Ave Annual Increase	No of Years
Labour	1995-96	508.50	35.68			
	1996-97	522.65	2.78			
	1997-98	542.94	3.88			
	1998-99	595.61	9.70			
	1999-00	653.38	9.70			
	2000-01	684.74	4.80			
	2001-02	672.99	(1.72)			
	2002-03	679.65	0.99			
	2003-04	862.07	26.84			
	2004-05	924.14	7.20			
	2005-06	970.25	4.99			
	2006-07	1,013.33	4.44	109.28%	9.11%	12
Conservative	2007-08	1,053.76	3.99			
	2008-09	1,095.81	3.99			
	2009-10	1,137.89	3.84			
	2010-11	1,150.11	1.07			
	2011-12	1,150.11	0.00			
	2012-13	1,150.11	0.00			
		2013-14	1,171.39	1.85	14.74%	2.11%

The facts are clear but yet we still hear no apology from Labour for doubling council tax in times of economic prosperity.

CQ247- 13 from Councillor Carole Bonner

LE

Will the Leader explain at what stage any application to obtain further funding from the Outer London Fund to be spent on Central Parade in New Addington has reached? Will he further advise what steps will be taken to ensure that Councillors from Fieldway and New Addington are involved at an early stage, and that a wide ranging public and business consultation will be conducted, especially given the public and business concerns about OLF1. Will he further advise what steps have been taken by the council and its elected representatives to exert pressure on UK Power and EDF to resolve the longstanding health and safety issue of lighting the stairwells to the flats above the shops.

Reply

The GLA have given approval in principal to the delivery of a second phase of improvements to the Eastern side of Central Parade, New Addington. This will be funded via the Mayors Regeneration Fund (MRF). This project will build on the improvements delivered as part of the Outer London Fund in 2012, by further enlivening Central Parade and improving the pedestrian environment. This will include updating footpaths, the layout of the car park and access to the shops along the High Street.

Consultation with local Councillors, residents and businesses took place in February and March to gain their views on the completed OLF project. This also sought to gain early engagement in, and initial feedback on the conceptual proposals for the phase 2 project.

Further consultation will take place as part of the design stage of the project, which will involve all stakeholders in the New Addington and Fieldway. Local Councillors will be engaged at the earliest stage of the process and their involvement will be sought on an ongoing basis.

The Council is working with the new Business Improvement District to resolve the lighting issues on the stairwells to the flats above the shops and through Croydon's elected representatives at the Council, London Assembly and Parliament, is putting concerted pressure on UK Power and EDF to resolve these issues.

CQ251- 13 from Councillor Stuart Collins

LE

Bearing in mind Croydon was supposed to received £17 million for the riot recovery I was shocked to hear only £60,000 is being allocated for the shop front / public realm improvements along London Road.

The London Road community are trying to create a Broad Green Village so will you now insist that the Mayor gives Croydon the rest of the £17 million in a ring fenced fund so that local people not consultants can decide how much and where this money is spent.

Reply

The amount of Mayor's Regeneration Fund for Croydon is in fact £23m not £17m and the amount allocated to the London Road area is closer to £9.2m, not £60,000 as suggested.

The fund is being spent on a wide range of measures, which are a direct response to many of the recommendations made in the Riots Review which was published in February 2012. This report was produced in tandem with a number of individuals and interest groups from the local community.

The Council has engaged continuously and comprehensively with the various community and business groups since the riots to ensure that the projects are tackling the issues that are important to the local residents and businesses. Officers have also engaged with the London Road community regarding the wish to create Broad Green Village.

There are three main elements to the proposed work on London Road and the surrounding area of West Croydon and this work has been designed in conjunction with the community. These can be broken down into the following components:

£3.05m of the Mayor's Regeneration Fund has been allocated to improve London Road between Oakfield Road and Sumner Road. Of this, £900k is earmarked for improvements to building facades ranging from small scale interventions such as new signs and repainting, new windows and new shop-fronts. These works will start this year. The remaining £2.05m is set aside for improving the look and feel of the public areas, including repairs, new paving, new lighting and decongesting cluttered pavements. This work will be carried out in 2014.

South of Oakfield Road, the public areas on London Road will be repaired, repaved and made more pleasant as part of the £4.6m West Croydon Interchange improvements. This will transform the public realm, including a wider tram stop, more space for pedestrians, a welcoming and legible arrival place outside West Croydon Station Road and better connections to the retail core and the vibrant retail area of London Road. The design team has been appointed and will engage the community to get involved in the design of their local area.

In addition £1.5m is set aside to deliver a package of measures to support job creation; a much needed outcome for the area. This is broken into 3 main themes:

- Business and Enterprise
- Social Cohesion
- Employment and skills

There is also on going negotiation with the GLA regarding a retail support package to support and build capacity of existing high street retailers and reduce the number of vacant units through new business development.

CQ262- 13 from Councillor Karen Jewitt

LE

Will the Leader of the Council take the Leader of Darlington Councils stance and say no one in his Borough will be evicted from their home because they cannot afford the 'bedroom tax' Can the he be the Leader our citizens need at this time and support tour the poorest members of our society through what is probably the most traumatic of their lives, losing their homes.

Reply

The council is holding face to face discussions with all tenants affected by the new under-occupation benefit rules to explain how they are affected and the options available for them.

We are helping under-occupying tenants of working age to move to smaller homes through transfers and mutual exchanges with other tenants. In 2012/13 25 tenants affected by the changes were transferred to smaller homes. We have held two 'speed swap' events which were well attended and the tenants who requested mutual exchanges there have been given details of potential exchange partners. In addition we held a joint welfare benefit advice and support day with public, private and third sector partner organisations at Fairfield halls on 19 April 2013. Over 600 residents attended this event and feedback from attendees and partner organisations such as Job Centre Plus, Home Swapper, Citizens Advice Bureau, Croydon Voluntary Action, Reed and ASDA supermarket has been excellent.

We are also helping affected tenants to explore options to enable them to remain in their accommodation through making up the shortfall in the rent, for example by

- finding well-enough paid work
- taking in a lodger or
- seeking increased contributions for the rent from other household members.

We do expect our tenants to engage with us and develop action plans to achieve sustainable solutions for themselves. Our support may extend to the payment of a discretionary housing payment, depending on tenants' personal circumstances, to enable them to attain a solution. However, we are making it clear to tenants that we expect them to meet their contractual responsibility to pay the rent. We will take steps to recover any arrears in rent, including seeking possession of the property, if necessary.

Unfortunately we are faced with tough choices in these difficult times and while we will always work hard to help all social housing tenants, I'm sure that you will agree that we must prioritise those children and families living in overcrowded accommodation over those people living in under occupied council properties.

CQ263- 13 from Councillor Karen Jewitt

LE

Will the Leader of the Council explain what was meant when members of the Labour Group were accused of scaremongering when we said there would be an Incinerator if not in Croydon on the borders of it and Sutton, when his party said in leaflets during the Waddon by election that this was not true and it would not happen, we need that explanation, the voters need that explanation from him.

Reply

Thank you for your question.

What we need at this time is rational debate that is based on facts and this is where the Labour party continues to fail the people of Croydon. At various times you have claimed that we will build an incinerator in Croydon, then you said that one would be built on Factory Lane and the scaremongering hit new heights when you said that we would in fact be building two incinerators in Croydon.

It is typical of Labour's scaremongering to try and compare apples with oranges, and this is why Labour are crudely describing the proposed energy recovery system as just an old fashioned incinerator that solely burns waste. What is actually being proposed is a far more advanced and complex facility that, while burning waste, produces and harnesses energy for our collective benefit. During the processing of waste, the proposed facility will produce fewer emissions than ordinary landfill. In fact, the proposed new facility will eradicate the need for landfill in Croydon and the proposal is for the existing landfill facilities at Beddington Lane to be converted into a country park.

It's also worth remembering what the Labour party's position has been on managing waste. The previous Labour government forced all local authorities to produce 'waste reduction plans' that had to include options for incinerators. This was the wheeze that Labour used to force incinerators on towns around the country. At a local level, the Croydon Labour party left a legacy of one of the worst recycling rates in London. Since 2006 we have worked hard to improve waste management in Croydon by providing better facilities for residents and curbing the growing costs. Following Conservative investment in recycling we now have recycling rates in the top quartile nationally – this is saving Croydon taxpayers' money through reduced landfill charges.

Of course, the Croydon Labour party have form for scaremongering and talking Croydon down. Right now you can hear them saying how more police officers on our streets is a bad thing, how a highly cost efficient building for staff and customers is bad news and on waste it is just more of the same. I would urge Councillor Jewitt and her party colleagues to get their own house in order and to stop the unnecessary scaremongering.

CQ264- 13 from Councillor Karen Jewitt

LE

Can the Leader explain why the Incinerator will be larger than we need? Is it to expand in the near future? Have we a traffic management study showing how much traffic there will be when it is run to full capacity allowing it to make a profit that is sustainable to the private company who will be running it, now and in the future. I and the residents would be interested in the carbon footprint of those lorries to come.

Reply

The Energy Recovery Facility (ERF) planning application is for 300 tonnes which allows for a 10% contingency to manage the different calorific value of waste being delivered to the facility and the commercial view from Virridor is that this will allow them to treat the South London Waste Partnerships residual waste together with existing commercial customers waste which will be diverted from landfill and treated through the ERF.

There are no plans to expand the facility.

Sutton Council will be determining the planning application on 24th April 2013. Thereafter, the resolution, if that is to grant permission, will be considered by the Mayor of London. A Transport Assessment was submitted to Sutton Council as part of their planning application submission and will form part of the determination of the proposals. Transport for London have been notified of the application and early indications are that they have no objections to the development.

In terms of traffic generation, the 2023 scenario (when the original Virridor contract expires) is that there will be less lorry movements than there are now because landfill will by then have come to an end. If permission were to be granted by Sutton and the Mayor, there would be a period during the demolition and construction phase where there would be a slight increase in traffic. This is because at that stage landfill and other waste management activity, such as recycling and composting, will continue at the site.

CQ268- 13 from Councillor Shafi Khan

LE

Can the Leader tell us how many Croydon residents have seen their income dropped, since the introduction of the new bedroom tax, alongside with cut in Council Tax support and a new cap on benefit increases to just one percent?

Reply

There are 15,439 households in Croydon affected by either the under occupancy changes or the replacement of Council tax Benefit with Council Tax support. Of these just under 12,000 households have seen their income reduced by less than £10 per week. Overall the average reduction in income per household is £3.70 per week.

To support residents through these changes, arrangements include a combined working team comprising of officers from customer services, welfare/benefits, housing and children's services as well as officers from Job Centre Plus. This team has proactively contacted customers most affected by the changes, with over 1,700 of the most affected residents targeted for assistance. Home visits have and are being conducted to raise awareness, provide support to find work, give advice regarding moving, establish whether other benefits maybe available or simply budget planning and debt advice.

We have also expanded our front facing service in Access Croydon to include representatives from Jobcentre Plus, CAB and welfare rights so that customers can take advantage from a wide range of different advice and options all in one place.

To further help residents we have added support and advice to our website, placed articles in the local paper and sent mail shots to all affected households to help raise awareness. We also held a joint welfare benefit advice and support day with public, private and third sector partner organisations at Fairfield halls on 19 April 2013. Over 600 residents attended this event and feedback from attendees and partner organisations such as Job Centre Plus, Home Swapper, Citizens Advice Bureau, Croydon Voluntary Action, Reed and ASDA supermarket has been excellent.

CQ271- 13 from Councillor Matthew Kyeremeh

LE

The Sustainable Communities Act makes it possible for the Council to have power to charge a local levy on large supermarkets, and be allowed to spend that levy on helping local businesses and services. A similar levy was introduced last year by the North Ireland government and is reported to be working well with regards to helping small and medium sized business there.

Would the Leader consider putting such a proposal forward under the Sustainable Communities Act to help small local businesses and services in Croydon?

Reply

Thank you for your question.

The so-called 'Tesco Tax' was introduced in Northern Ireland from April 2012, with the aim of higher taxation levied on larger stores to subsidise the taxes paid by smaller stores. The scheme is modest in scope, with only around £5million in savings generated for small businesses across the whole of that country.

Extensive business rates relief has been in place for small businesses in England since April 2010. Between April 2010 and September 2010, relief of up to 50% was available to businesses with rateable values under £6000. Relief was also available on a sliding scale for small businesses with a rateable value up to £1200. From the first of October 2010, this coalition Government has doubled business rate relief for all small businesses, giving up to 100% reductions for small businesses with rateable values under £6000 and the government recently announced that the reliefs would remain in place for 2013/14, giving small businesses more breathing space for a further year.

Just for completeness, the Sustainable Communities Act does not give this Council the power to charge local levies, but rather gives Councils the opportunity to seek Government permission to introduce schemes that promote local sustainability, but given that small businesses are already receiving up to 100% business rates relief, I would not be minded to consider introducing any further levies on any business in Croydon at a time when we are growing the local economy.

CQ280- 13 from Councillor Tony Newman

LE

In light of recent failures what improvements are you considering to the Council's procurement process?

Reply

The Council spends over £340m with third party organisation which is commissioned and procured. In 2012/13 we let 106 contracts with a value of over £181m. In the current year we will be delivering over 220 pieces of procurement with a value of over £400m for revenue services alone. Over the past three years we have achieved £25m of efficiencies savings through better procurement ensuring we protect front line services and deliver to Croydon residents an affordable Council Tax. I think the success of how we manage services delivered through procurement speaks for itself in terms of volume and savings.

The Council is committed to a process of continual improvement in relation to commissioning and procurement and has a set of objectives it remains committed to in pursuit of that improvement.

We launched our new approach to commissioning and procurement in July 2012 and later, through the year, with additional toolkits and handbooks to support 'expert commissioning':

- Social Value Toolkit
- Decommissioning Toolkit
- Contract Management Handbook

The Social Value and Decommissioning Toolkits were a specific commitment within the Strategy. They provide an additional focus on meeting local needs and delivering value for money, and as such, they align to the overarching vision for the Borough and the organisational priorities set out in our Corporate Plan.

The net benefits of a strengthened approach to commissioning and procurement are our efficiency savings - ensuring less than 20% of Council savings actually impacted on services to our residents. Croydon is involved with or leads on 6 major cost-saving collaborative commissioning projects with other councils and we are well on the way to finding £16 million of efficiency savings through the Procurement Taskforce.

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CQ281- 13 from Councillor Tony Newman

LE

Were you aware of Boris Johnsons plans to close most of Croydon's police stations were in place before the 2012 GLA elections?

Reply

Thank you for your question.

As I stated in my response to CQ087-13 in January, I was made aware of the consultation proposal at the same time as everyone else when this was publicly released on 9th January 2013. These are sound proposals that are focussed on reducing the number of under used police front desks to get more police officers on to the streets where they are needed most.

Since the proposals were published, I have had the opportunity to meet with the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime to discuss the proposals for Croydon and, as a result of this positive dialogue, those proposals have now moved on.

The latest position is that there will be a front Counter open at Croydon Police Station open 24 hours a day, seven days a week; a standard front counter will be opened at Windmill Road Custody Centre, open 10am to 6pm; and that six contact points will be established across the Borough. This, of course, is in addition to the extra 117 officers that the proposals will put onto the streets of Croydon.

We are currently in communication with the police service regarding plans for establishing police bases in London Road (West Croydon), New Addington and Purley.

CQ282- 13 from Councillor Tony Newman

LE

What plans do you have in place to lobby for a fair funding for Croydon from the Coalition government ahead of next year's local government settlement?

Reply

Thank you for your question.

Over the past few months I've been working hard with colleagues across the front bench and with Croydon's two Conservative MPs to highlight the issues in Croydon with government ministers and to seek a fairer funding settlement.

In particular, we have highlighted how many parts of Croydon have changed over the past ten years and illustrated Croydon has become more deprived while inner London has generally become more affluent.

Of course, these discussions are on-going and we cannot fix the broken local government finance system that was inherited from the previous Labour government overnight. That said, we have been listened to and have begun to see significant successes already.

I'm sure you are aware that Croydon has recently received the highest education capital grant in the country - £65m over the next two years, and this is a massive boost that will help us to meet the growing demand for primary school places across the Borough.

This is, of course, all in sharp contrast to the record of the previous Labour administration, who categorically failed in getting a fairer settlement for Croydon and instead turned to the people of Croydon to bail them out of their financial mess by increasing Council Tax by an average of 9.11% every year for 12 years.

CQ284- 13 from Councillor Raj Rajendran

LE

Croydon is one of the 4 London boroughs within the first phase roll out for welfare reform changes.

Can the Leader of the Council please explain the impact of those changes to Council's Departments and what controls the Council have to contain those problems and minimize the potential for legal action against Council or reputational damage?

Reply

The latest data we have shows the benefit cap will affect just over 700 families in the borough.

In addition to the project activity required to ensure that we are ready to administer the changes, we have undertaken some intense engagement with customers to prepare them for the forthcoming changes, this includes personal visit, telephone contact and the provision of a new co-ordinated front facing service with Jobcentre plus and citizens advice in access Croydon. Outside of this we have provided various information and advice through printed documentation and the council's website – this is there to assist residents where possible to support themselves.

Most recently on 19 April 2013 we held a joint welfare benefit advice and support day at Fairfield halls with partners from public, private and third sector organisations. Over 600 residents attended this event and feedback from attendees and partner organisations such as Job Centre Plus, Home Swapper, Citizens Advice Bureau, Croydon Voluntary Action, Reed and ASDA supermarket has been excellent.

Alongside our partners we have focused engagement with those that will be affected by the changes – offering a range of approaches including debt management advice, support into employment and options around housing. We are carefully tracking and recording all contact with those customers affected to ensure we are able to monitor outcomes over time. This has required additional resource to engage with affected customers, and to work with them to identify solutions to the situations they face. This work will continue over the coming months as we seek long term solutions for those affected. We have seen an increase in customer contact and would expect that to continue over coming months.

The most significant impact of the benefits cap is likely to be felt within housing. With the loss of housing benefit by those customers affected by the cap presenting a key risk to housing income unless sustainable solutions can be found. Housing have been working closely with the welfare reform team and residents to present options to support customers into sustainable tenancies, either by supporting customers to move or by helping them address the shortfall through gaining work or increasing their hours. Where necessary we will support customers through the transition period as they move properties, what is key is that customers recognize and take steps to address their situation.

Adults and Children's services have also played a key role in helping shape the engagement approach ensuring that those customers with underlying vulnerabilities

are supported through the process. These departments have also worked to ensure that a clear understanding of the customer's situation is available, to enable a holistic view of the customer to be taken as we seek to provide them with a long term solution. Through this focused joint working approach we believe we are as well placed as we could be to minimize the impact of the welfare reform changes both for the public and for the Council.

CQ286- 13

from Councillor Paul Scott

LE

Cllr Fisher and his Conservative colleagues regularly criticise the 27% Council Tax increase made ten years ago and yet over the last seven years have supported the difficult decision taken by the previous Labour administration by not reversing the increase and instead annually collecting the additional Council Tax raised. Please confirm how much Council Tax has been raised since May 2006 specifically as a result of that un-reversed increase.

Reply

Thank you for your question, which is almost identical to the question you submitted last time (CQ190-13).

No matter how many times you ask the question, there is no getting away from the fact that the previous Labour administration all but doubled Council Tax for Croydon taxpayers. Your average Council Tax increase was 9.11%, whereas this Conservative administration has had average rises of 2.11%, not one raise above 4% and has twice frozen Council Tax.

As your previous record in office illustrates, I appreciate that you don't understand how to sensibly manage public finances. If you did, you would have been able to properly plan and prepare the Council's budgets without having to make Council Tax increases of over 4% in eight of your twelve years in office.

When this administration came into office in 2006, we found the Council's finances in a perilous state in spite of the repeated hikes in council tax that you had forced upon the people of Croydon. Unlike the Labour party, we have not dived straight to the taxpayers' wallets and purses to find the answer. We have sought out over £118m in efficiencies, invested in preventative services and been innovative in finding ways to put Croydon back on a sound financial footing while keeping Council Tax rises to the bare minimum.

This has been achieved whilst dealing with inflationary pressures, massive increases in demand for services and the significant cuts in government grant. You can keep asking the question again and again but the facts won't change – when the going gets tough, the Croydon Labour party will always hike up Council Tax.

Are you seriously asking this Conservative administration to bail out the mistakes of your Labour administration? Whilst at the same time our national government bails out your party's national mistakes. In a nutshell you want someone to pick up the pieces; my advice to you is take responsibility for your past decisions.

If you are seriously making this point then please come clean with us all and provide a list of the services you would cut to reverse the Labour hikes in Council Tax.

CQ287- 13 from Councillor Paul Scott

LE

Please confirm the full installed cost of each individual office, meeting and executive office chair to be purchased for the new luxury Bernard Weatherill council offices?

Reply

To answer your queries please refer to answers below:

- There are no individual offices for Council executives.
- No provision has been made to provide a different office chair solution for Executives. In some cases specialist chairs will be provided to staff with individual and specialist needs in accordance with our responsibilities under the Equalities Act.
- The meeting rooms throughout the building will have the same specification of furniture although some products will differ based on space allowance

The issues you have raised were thoroughly discussed at the Scrutiny and Strategic Overview Committee call-in on the 16th April, which decided not to refer the decision back to the Cabinet Member.

I know that you are determined to scaremonger and talk Croydon down, but it really is about time that you and your party accepted that these are not luxury offices. While you would be busy cutting services and hiking council tax to waste millions more on preserving Taberner House, this administration is protecting front line services by finding more efficient ways of running our services. This includes reducing our overall office accommodation and moving into Bernard Weatherill House.

It puzzles me as to why you keep ignoring the facts and I would advise you to read the answer to CQ215 again. We are providing much needed accommodation that is fit for the 21st Century, will provide better services to our customers, a decent home to our staff, allow more efficient working methods and improve relations with our partners that will also be using the building, such as the NHS, the Metropolitan Police, Job Centre Plus and the Citizen's advice bureau. We are doing this all for around £30million pounds less than the Labour proposed alternative. Perhaps you could tell us which services you would cut to fund your ill thought out plans for refurbishing Taberner House?