



THORNTON HEATH

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OVER 7,000 GET THE VACCINE

Medical professionals have been leading online vaccine debates urging members of the BAME community 'don't die of ignorance' after a low take up of the jab.

Croydon BME Forum has joined forces with local organisations in a bid to inform the black community about the Covid-19 vaccines to encourage residents to make informed choices.

So far over 7,000 people have now received their Covid-19 vaccination at St Paul's Church thanks to an amazing community effort from doctors, nurses, surgery staff and volunteers.

Local GP Dr Agnelo Fernandes said: "These vaccines are safe and effective and it is an honour to be able to protect our patients and help local people get through this pandemic."

Among those happy to receive the jab was West Thornton councillor Janet Campbell (pictured).

BME Forum CEO Andrew Brown said: "We know many have concerns, which is why they are hesitant to take the vaccine, so over the next few months we will be engaging with local communities to give them a chance to ask experts about the vaccine so that they can make an informed decision."

►► TURN TO PAGES 6 & 7

SCHOOL'S EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR PUPILS FACING FOOD POVERTY

A school has taken the unprecedented step of setting up a Go Fund Me appeal to support several families that require urgent assistance to help them through the coming months to ensure that children have basic access to food, sanitation, warmth and education.

The Paxton Academy on London Road has 50 per cent of students living in households that can be described as within the top 25 per cent most deprived in the UK and 94 per cent within the top 50 per cent.

Each week, 127 of the 195 children at Paxton, which is part of the Wandle Learning Trust, receive Free School Meal vouchers to use in local supermarkets.

During this most recent lockdown, staff have also delivered shopping to the homes of children and their families who

HIS GRACE FOOD BANK APPEALS FOR DONATIONS TO FEED 100 STRONG QUEUE

have been suffering or self-isolating from the coronavirus and are unable to leave the house, with staff also referring a number of families to local food banks.

Many Paxton families were living on the breadline before Covid-19 struck - but now they are in far a worse position which is why the school has launched the £8,000 appeal target.

Parents have lost their jobs, food and utility bills have increased with the children at home all day, every day and many students, especially those with SEN which is 14 per cent of the student

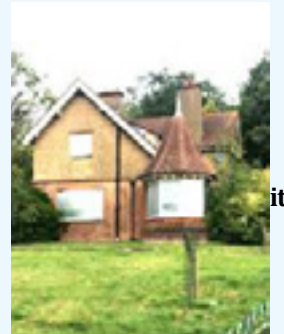
population, are struggling with a lack of stimulation, expertise and equipment that would normally offer them assistance with their learning. Although schooling is being offered to vulnerable children, many are frightened to take this up and put themselves at risk of the virus.

The start to the Spring term, was like no other for Paxton explained Headteacher Theresa Moses and over the last five weeks, the school has undertaken a huge transformation in providing an education for the children, whether in school or remotely at home.

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COUNCIL RENEGES ON SALE OF LODGE

The council has reneged on a public statement it made a year ago that would NOT sell Heath Lodge in Grangewood Park.



The bankrupt council had kept secret the list of assets it planned to sell discussing it under Part B, which is confidential and not open to the public. Now the details have been revealed in papers which were meant to be discussed at cabinet on Thursday (Feb 18) but have been delayed

►► TURN TO PAGE 11

HUNT FOR EVIL ACID ATTACKER WHO BLINDED TEENAGE REFUGEE

Two refugees who fled a brutal dictatorship have spoken of the terrifying moment they had acid thrown in their faces on a Thornton Heath street, blinding one of them.



The violent and unprovoked attack has shocked the community and in a renewed police appeal for information, to prevent the assailant striking again, Crimestoppers have offered a £5,000 reward.

However, it is little solace to the victims, aged 19 and 25, refugees from Eritrea, who burned and disfigured by the acid will live with the scars and trauma of that day forever.

The Croydon based Da'aro Youth Project charity which is working with the victims has raised over £20,000 after setting up a JustGiving page to help deal with the life-changing injuries caused by the horrendous attack on Monday December 7 which happened on Gonville Road as they walked to college.

The 19-year-old sadly has permanent sight loss as a result of the attack.

Speaking to The Chronicle he said: "It is very hard for me to explain. Mentally and physically I have lost so many things.

"I wish I could go to church and pray with my people. But now, nobody is able to help me. It is the worst experience I have ever had

"We come from Eritrea. In this country we don't have the opportunity to study because of the dictatorship.

"It was a long journey to the UK, I suffered a lot in Libya and in Calais. I believed that the UK was a good country, where people believe in law. I didn't think this kind of attack would happen to me here.

"I just thought I could study and help my family. I didn't expect someone would attack me. My injury is forever. I didn't expect this would happen - I didn't know about acid before this attack. I didn't know what it was."

►► TURN TO PAGE 2

BARBER CUT WITH £10K COVID FINE

A barber shop in Thornton Heath has been issued with a £10,000 fixed penalty for flouting Covid-19 rules.

The barber was busted by Thornton Heath Safer Neighbourhood Team on February 6, after they visited the premises and found 15 customers awaiting hair cuts. Their details were also taken.

Police have dished out a number of fines for breaking the Covid rules and have been carrying out checks of shops across the three Thornton Heath wards.

Shop workers were issued with warnings that they faced fines if they did not wear masks.

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HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ACTION

A survey is asking residents to share their ideas on what they would like a community group to achieve over the next two years and how they can help to achieve that.

Volunteer led Thornton Heath Community Action Team is holding its first meeting for over a year on Zoom on Wednesday February 24 at 6.30pm. The meeting, the first since Covid, will discuss the findings of the survey.

To fill in the survey visit www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9BJ3V3F

Guest speaker Dr Agnelo Fernandes, from the Parchmore Medical Practice will talk about the vaccination programme roll out and the impact of Covid on our community. He will be available to answer questions.

The meeting will mark a one minute silence providing the opportunity for family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and others suffering bereavement during this pandemic to commemorate a loved one.

To register to attend the meeting visit www.thorntotonheath.net

Long time resident of Thornton Heath and THCAT member Cédric Monvoisin sadly passed in November aged 45. His partner Craig set up a fund to create a lasting memorial to Cédric which reached £8,500 . The aim is to plant 10 trees on Brook Road where Cédric lived.

Thre will be an update on the progress of the project at the meeting..

OPERATION CLEVELAND: DRUGS AND WEAPONS SEIZED

Police have launched a new initiative in a bid to tackle violent crime in Croydon after a spree of stabbings over 24 hours.

Operation Cleveland was planned prior to the violence and is focused on West Croydon in particular where at least one of the stabbings took place and officers are working out of Croydon Voluntary Action's London Road HQ.

Police said the knife attacks were believed to be isolated incidents and included the murder of Lavaan Witter, 22 in Selhurst on Friday (Feb 5).

Operation Cleveland has already resulted in 28 arrests predominantly for drugs with 215 people stopped and searched and nine weapons recovered along with countless quantities of drugs.

SUPPORT THE CHRONICLE IN 2021 OR IT WILL BE NO MORE

The Thornton Heath Chronicle has been receiving record numbers of page views on its social media sites.

If every one of those tens of thousands of people had donated just £1 towards supporting The Chronicle we would have the funds to continue for five years.

Sadly, we have had no support for our survival campaign from readers since the last publication.

The numbers of people reading The Chronicle news feeds demonstrates the desire for local news and this edition, one of our best, covers so many important and powerful issues.

The Chronicle has always been funded on a shoestring .

Support from Community ward budgets, which have now been axed by the council and funding from Thornton Heath Community Action Team People's Heath Trust bid, have paid for the printing and design costs in the past.

With barely any advertising and revenue coming in we need your support more than ever.

To donate to The Chronicle survival campaign: www.gofundme.com/f/support-local-newspapers

FOOD PARCEL FRIDAY

Guiding Hands has been supplying door to door delivery of food parcels every Friday during the Covid lockdown for people on Universal Credit or a low income.

The project is part of funding targeting the BAME community and the parcels include plantain, green bananas, pumpkin, cornmeal, saltfish and callaloo.

The charity's Let's Cook Chef Kem, has also been creating quick and easy dishes with interactive questions and tips for meal ideas on its web-site..

For more info and to book your food parcel visit: www.guidinghands.org.uk

EXCLUSIVE: INTERVIEW WITH TEENAGE REFUGEE BLINDED BY ACID

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The teenager, who has leave to remain, thanked donors: "I really appreciate for what they have done. All of these people who have supported me are very good people. May god bless them, would like to thank everyone individually.

The 25-year-old victim, who suffered facial burns and injuries to his eyes is an asylum-seeker from Eritrea still awaiting outcome of his claim said: "We left my friend's house early to go to college. When we were walking to college, we saw a man with a mask walking towards us. We didn't expect anything. We were waiting for the lights to change at the pedestrian crossing on Thornton Road in front of the St Jude with St Aidan Church.

Suddenly, completely unprovoked, the man threw acid at my friend's face and then my face too. It was more than painful. I was completely blinded. I ran out into the road, not seeing where I was going. My friend ran away, screaming, along Thornton Road. The attacker ran away down Limsfield Avenue.

A man stopped his car and called the ambulance. I could hear them but couldn't see anything. They told me to pour water on my face, I had a bottle in my bag and I poured it on my face. They helped flag down the ambulance. I didn't see my friend again until much later that night."

We are not naming the victims who fear retribution.

They are both urging their attacker to go to the police and admit to 'what you have done' but fear: "We are worried they could



attack us again or attack another person. We feel it is not safe for anyone until they are caught."

The Da'aro Youth Project which was established in 2018 by members of the Eritrean community in London in response to the deaths of a number of teenage Eritreans by suicide put questions to the victims on behalf of The Chronicle.

The 25-year-old who is studying to be an engineer but is presently remote learning added: "It is unacceptable to me what is happened. We do not know why this has happened - Is this man who attacked us a racist?"

At 8am in the morning - someone comes and throws acid, can you imagine? I haven't been able to sleep since this happened to me. I think many things that are not good to thing. I am afraid to go

outside. I didn't have idea people could attack other people like this in the UK."

The perpetrator of this acid attack had been seen by one of the victims a few months earlier, on Monday September 7, when he called at their address claiming to have a letter for him.

When the victim went into the street (as seen in the CCTV footage) the suspect punched him in the face.

DC Dimitri Savathrakis, of the South Area CID reactive team, said: "This was a violent and unprovoked attack on two innocent victims and we are doing everything in our power to bring the person responsible to justice."

Deputy leader of the council Stuart King, who is the ward councillor for West Thornton where the attack happened described it as an 'absolutely despicable and cowardly act' and urged anyone with information to contact the police.

The suspect is described as a white or Asian man in his 30's with a slim build. At the time of the attack he was wearing a blue medical mask, a long black jacket with the hood up, black trousers and shoes.

Alexa Loukas, London Regional Manager at the charity Crimestoppers, said:"The individual behind the acid attack could strike again, so it's critical that anyone who knows or has suspicions about who was involved contacts our charity 100 per cent anonymously."

Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111

DRIVER FLEES AFTER CRASHING IN TO HOUSE

A driver of a car that ploughed in to a house in the early hours has been arrested on suspicion of drink driving and fleeing the scene of an accident.

Police were called at 1:30am on Tuesday February 9 to Whitehorse Road, and found the abandoned car which had partially demolished the wall of a house on the corner of Bensham Manor Road.

A police spokesman said there were no reports of any injuries or any other vehicles involved in the collision.

The spokesman added: "A 41-year-old man was subsequently traced to a nearby address and was arrested on suspicion of drink drive; failing to stop at the scene of an accident and assaulting an emergency services worker.



Alina Curea

WINTER WONDERLAND: SOAKING UP THE SNOW AND SUNSETS DURING LOCKDOWN

The lockdown has brought a greater appreciation of the environment we live in with beautiful sunsets and the joy of the snow.

We love our sunsets here in Thornton Heath but the two recent bouts of heavy snow, the first since 2017, were particularly special.

Grangewood Park provided the ideal backdrop for snowball fights, building snowmen and sledging.

Despite the pandemic and restrictions placed on our lives it has been great to be able to see so many families and children enjoying playing in the snow which we hope is reflected in this collection of pictures.



Sonia Cousillas



Freya Marshall



Lauren Eels



Michael Daniels



Andrea Perry

TEENAGER'S POEM TURNED IN TO POWERFUL FILM CALLING OUT BLACK STEREOTYPES



A teenage girl's poem has been turned in to a powerful short film which reflects on her experiences of the systemic inequities that she and other black youths in the UK face on a daily basis, both in and out of school.

Abi Simms poem, "Being Black & 6Teen" provides a compelling and distinctly British insight into growing up young and black and was penned the day she found out about the brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of police in America.

The intimate portrait contrasts the hardship and beauty of the 16-year-old's life growing up in Thornton Heath.

Commenting on her film's message, Abi, said: "What I want people to take from this film is the misconception of what it is to be black and what it is to be 16. I labelled a few stereotypes that we hear from a young age and just hoped people would understand what it really feels like."

Abi's poem was chosen to feature in the film which she also stars in, as part of a project run by Football Beyond Borders, a pioneering charity which works to help spark youth creativity.

The Beyond Bars campaign brings to life the immense potential young people possess, and how with the right support they can flourish.

The project began with virtual writing workshops, led by professional writers, spoken word artists and creatives, who held sessions on Zoom for more than 60 young people. The participants, ranging in age from 13 to 16, were asked to write personal poems based on their lives in lockdown with the most promising applicant given the opportunity to have their poems turned into a short film by production company Caviar directed by Lainey Richardson and produced by Tash Bloom.

The two winners, Abi and Yassin Slimani-Mendez, 14, won the chance to turn their words into short films

Abi has talked about her writing techniques and how important the challenge was to her to alleviate the isolation of lockdown: "Some days I just wanted to close myself away not speak to a single soul, other days I'd be all for a conversation. But most of my time spent in solitary I was antisocial, my phone remained on DnD, and I kept the conversation minimal.

"When applying they asked us questions like why do we write...and I simply said I write for a distraction.

"When I write I can get lost in my piece and I think that's what makes my connection to it so unique, I never know what the outcome is, neither do I know how many pages will get screwed up till I have my final piece but I do know that it will always be hard hitting and a thought bender.

"This programme gave me hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

"When I write my inspiration usually comes from musicians, for example in Being Black and 6teen there is a shot of different quotes that I have on my wall, and there's a variety of Tupac, MLK, Rosa Parks, Colin Kaepernick and even Maya Angelo...to name a few.

"They all have different flows and ways of writing/talking and a couple steps before I take pen to paper, I always do my research."

Abi also talks about the experience of producing the film: "Day one on the

shoot, there were vans parked up outside my house from early morning waiting to unload, there were so many people coming in and out, it was unreal.

"Lainey and Tash both poked their head in the door to say 'hi' and that 'it'll be great' and I was quickly rushed upstairs to change and get my hair done. At least I know what it's like to be a proper actress for 3 days :).

"When I saw the BTS shots, it looked like something straight out of TopBoy, and I still think the same."

Lainey Richardson, who directed both films, said: "Abi's poem brought tears to my eyes the first time I read it. So unique to Abi's own experience, yet so powerful in its ability to articulate sentiments that I think a lot of people can relate to, it felt like such an important and relevant perspective to bring to screen. I really think we may have discovered a star in the making!"

Abi has gone on to lead a Co-op Christmas campaign Everyone's Giving Double again performing a spoken word piece focussing on life under Covid.

Jasper Kain, who co-founded FBB in 2014, has seen first hand how lacking the support for the UK's most vulnerable young people has been: "Being a black teenager comes with lots of stereotypes and expectations that have to be navigated, and Abi's poem expertly confronts this. It showcases her supreme talents and the changing face of modern Britain."

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vblC9lFW9s

"I labelled a few stereotypes that we hear from a young age and just hoped people would understand what it really feels like."

BOY WHO LEFT THORNTON HEATH WITH NO EXAMS AND 'NO HOPE' RETURNS AS HEADTEACHER

Saqib Chaudhri grew up in Thornton Heath and went to Ingram High School in the 90s which was labelled one of the 18 worst schools in Britain.

He left there with no GCSEs and no hope. Now he is a headteacher of a school in Croydon and hopes telling his remarkable story will empower the next generation.

Growing up in a working class family in the 80s and 90s in Thornton Heath wasn't easy, what made it even harder for children like me at the time was the poor standard of schools in the area. A number of schools had been placed on the "government red list" for proposed closure.

School for was me was a miserable time in my life, during primary school I can remember being in trouble more often than not, either being sent to stand outside the classroom or to the Headteachers office where often I was left to my own devices.

For secondary school my immigrant parents sent me to the nearest school to our home in Parchmore, unbeknown to them Ingram High School for Boys was earmarked by the Conservative government at the time as one of the worst schools in the country.

My days at Ingram were filled with mostly poor teaching and a remarkable admiration for those teachers who planned and delivered lessons that engaged some of the most difficult to reach children. Although never a child



to get many detentions, what I also rarely received at Ingram was a quality of teaching that would enable me to be socially mobile and move out of the trappings of poverty that I found myself in at such an early age.

Through those years I became acutely aware of the poor education and social norms I was being exposed to and more and more I became disengaged with the school and finished Year 11 with little else but a feeling of having been failed and being a failure.

I was fortunate enough at the time to have a family that truly cared and believed in my potential. My mother and sister decided that the best intervention for me at this juncture in my life was to remove me from South London and we moved to Burnley in Lancashire where we had family.

Here, in the rural town my father

first came into in the 1950s when he emigrated from Pakistan, I enrolled into a college and retook my GCSEs.

Not only did I find the lessons fun and the learning challenging but I also began to grow in confidence, finding not only that I had a knack for learning but also that I had an inquisitive mind that craved knowledge.

I very quickly fell in love with my A Level subjects of Physics, Computing and more so with Sociology which lit a fire in me to change society so that others didn't have to suffer the same disadvantage I experience at such an early age.

Fast forward the story to 2021 and I have just completed my first year of the headship at Oasis Academy Shirley Park Secondary and Sixth Form.

In the past three years since I have been there the school has achieved GCSE results in the top 17 per cent of the country and sixth form results that place us in the top one per cent of all sixth forms nationally.

As a school we serve that very same community that I grew up in. Last year we celebrated our first ever student to be admitted to Cambridge University and

I am determined to make our school a beacon of hope and aspiration, especially in the times we live in today where social disadvantage and political discord are so tumultuous.

As much as I look back at my childhood as wasted years, they give me drive and energy to ensure that no child under my care will ever have to suffer the disadvantage that I did.

Although we exist in hard times today, as a school community we have banded together and whether our families needed food parcels delivered or help with getting free internet – we have been there for them. Over 90 per cent of our children attend our online learning provision and we still have over 50 children attending our school site each day who need us the most.

I hope that in time, my story of being upwardly socially mobile and breaking that shackles of disadvantage won't be a news worthy tale but instead

the norm for the children of Croydon, ultimately if we want our world to become a better place, we must empower the next generation to take us there.

Twitter: @mr_chaudhri

"As much as I look back at my childhood as wasted years, they give me drive and energy to ensure that no child under my care will ever have to suffer the disadvantage that I did."

TRIBUTES PAID TO 'THE COOL KID'



Croydon poet laureate Shaniqua Benjamin and Elliott-Jay Munroop pay tribute to their close friend Charles Bachoar who tragically died at the age of 18.

On 5th January 2021, Thornton Heath, Peru, and the world lost a very special individual in Charles Bachoar:

Peru born, but Croydon based, Charles was a creative and fitness enthusiast who loved all things photography, football and fashion. His warm smile, comforting words and gentle approach made him stand out in an area where not many people can relate.

Charles spread love and joy wherever he went, never failing to make friends and seamlessly integrate himself into various groups, without losing himself in the process.

You could guarantee that he would always be unapologetically Charles, whether that was at Oasis Academy Shirley Park, Croydon College or sports clubs.

We had the blessing of meeting him at our local church, Croydon Seventh Day Adventist Church in Selhurst, where you'd regularly find him in the company of those older than him – he soaked up wisdom but also had plenty of

wisdom to give.

Charles was just 18 when he was taken from us, due to complications caused by haemophilia, a rare condition that affects the blood's ability to clot.

In spite of his health struggles, including problems with his liver, Charles never complained and lived life to its fullest, making the most of every opportunity. He was always up for trying something new and having something to do.

Charles left behind an abundance of memories, which will leave us laughing and smiling. He will be forever remembered, especially through his lasting legacy of loving others, staying curious, and making the most of life. Long live the cool kid.

•A fund has so far raised almost £12,000 of the £15,000 goal towards the funeral costs, a memorial and tribute in June on Charles's birthday.

uk.gofundme.com/f/supporting-the-family-memory-of-charles-bachoar



SINGER'S LYRICS INSPIRED BY FORREST GUMP!

A singer songwriter has taken a classic quote from the hit movie Forrest Gump for the lyrics of her latest release.

The new video for Dédé Davi's latest catchy song 'Stupid Is As Stupid Does', has just landed.

Dédé, from Thornton Heath, made the video with fellow Croydoner Antonio Lewis after connecting with him on the Croydon Composers project last autumn.

In 2017 Dédé's, debut song Calling the Clock, featuring Alan Wilder a member of the eighties electronic band Depeche Mode took Germany by storm reaching No. 11 in the alternative charts.

Her latest video was shot just before the latest lockdown and Dédé admits in terms of writing songs: "That's a bit harder as there isn't much inspiration being indoors all the time!"

"I've just finished writing and performing a piece for a London Mozart players collaboration and that piece was written with the Croydon Poet Laureate Shaniqua Benjamin also from Thornton Heath. She had decided to write about the pandemic so it was a case of using her angle and adapting it into a pop song."

To download the video and hear Stupid is As Stupid Does go to https://youtu.be/zKVCskAiaggM:

Order online at www.fireaway.co.uk in store or download the app

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FUNERAL STAFF IN TEARS AT SHEER TOLL OF COVID PANDEMIC

Along established family of funeral directors Rowland Brothers have been at the forefront of the tragic losses felt by friends and families during the pandemic.

The past year has seen those directly affected by restrictions having their final goodbyes stolen from them, compounding their loss and grief.

The sheer volume of the death toll has reduced shocked staff to tears and seeking counselling. Funerals for husbands and wives both taken by Covid are common and initial restrictions frustrating, to the point where a 10-year-old boy was forced to sit apart from his mother at the funeral of his own father.

Rowland Brothers have welcomed less severe restrictions so they can now facilitate dignified departures so families are able to grieve their loved ones properly and have the intimate goodbyes the virus has robbed them of.

Their harrowing work during the pandemic recently featured in an article in the New York Times written by Pulitzer prize-winning American photojournalist Lynsey Addario who has allowed us to use this picture..

Managing Director Steve Rowland, said: "Now, even though it's busy and we are booking funerals in to April, back in April last year it was on another level altogether.

"We all help each other here, doing the best we can but some of our staff have been in tears at all the stress of the whole



Picture credit: Lynsey Addario for The New York Times

thing and just the volume of work. Back in April we were doing 22 funerals a day, a day.... it's just shocking. Now we are probably doing 10 a day which we can cope with.

"Funerals are traumatic any way but it was like a conveyor belt procession and we were left thinking: 'what the hells happening'."

Croydon has more care homes than anywhere else in the capital, and at the height of the first wave Rowland Brothers were being called two to three times a day to the same home to collect people: "In the end we were under so much stress we had to say just call us at 6pm and we will go and collect all the people that had died, that's how bad it got in April. I am surprised in some of nursing homes any residents were left - that's how shocking it was."

He added: "In this moment in time in terms

of funeral numbers now we haven't been as badly hit as Bromley, and Bexley where there's been an incredible amount of mortality in those areas but the numbers are very high and there are a lot of Covid cases.

"Covid seems to be affecting people from 50 plus, so don't just think its the 70 pluses its not. Anyone tells you its not real they need to come and do a tour of our premises we will show them how real it is."

Rowland Brothers was established

in 1873 by Tony Rowland's great grandfather. Tony, is a well known community figure in Thornton Heath having chaired the festival committee for many years Steve has been a part of the family business for over 30 years

"Now families can have a hearse, they can have a limousine, go to church and then go to the cemetery. It is getting back to our traditional style of funeral just mourners are restricted," he said.

A testament to the company's thorough PPE regime, including precautions to prevent cross contamination, is that only one of member of staff contracted Covid and that was through his son who had

been at school.

Steve said:"Our staff have been under incredible pressure. Not only the worry of catching it themselves because they are in a frontline situation but taking it home to their families. The local surgeries were very helpful to us and recognised we are on the front line and managed to give all of our staff vaccinations which has been fantastic."

Rowland Brothers started the Rowland Brothers Foundation a couple of years ago and employ bereavement counsellors free to anyone who comes to them for a funeral service.

Steve explained: "What we are also finding is a lot of our staff are going to

the counsellors because they have been under such incredible amount of stress and pressure.

"We had to employ another counsellor just to cope with the workload. A lot of people are suffering and they want help. The grief is lasting it is very deep and lasting a lot longer than it normally does.

"Our receptionist John (Rule - pictured) lost his mother recently to Covid and has now just lost his father. Generally it seems to happen that way. People spend their lives together and one goes and the other one gives up and says 'that's it'."

"Anyone tells you Covid's not real they need to come and do a tour of our premises and we will show them how real it is.

THORNTON HEATH LOSES TRUE GENTLEMAN MOHAN TO COVID

Tributes have been paid to 'true gentleman' Mohan Singh Dhamrait OBE who lived life to the full and dedicated his life to helping others.

Mohan who sadly passed away on January 22 at the age of 80, after a short battle with COVID-19 was a much loved member of the Thornton Heath community, a devoted family man and loyal friend.



His family said: "Mohan will be remembered by all as a gentleman, loyal, genuine, hardworking and committed person in all that he did.

He led by example, he was a 'man of the people'. He dedicated his life to helping others. He had such a kind soul and was always so forgiving. Mohan's inner belief in all that he did was to add value and support others."

Committed to his Sikh faith, Mohan participated in regular service at Khalsa Centre Tooting and also Croydon Gurdwara.

He had worked as a Senior Spectrum Engineer, completing over 35 years of Government Service, with his hard work and devotion recognised when he was awarded an OBE by Prince Charles.

Mohan was also an enthusiastic union activist and was a champion of equal opportunities.

He was a member of Trade Unions from 1965 becoming the first Sikh/Asian appointed to the Trade Union Congress representing the TUC Race Committee from 1995-2001.

In 2001 he received the TUC Gold Badge of Congress award for invaluable services to trade unionism. He had also been a member of Labour Party and served as chair of the Thornton Heath ward group.

He had a passion for socialising with family and friends, gardening, photography and loved visiting places.

In retirement he was a great supporter of the community serving as a former chair and member of the Thornton Heath Local Policing Ward Panel and Secretary of the Parchmore Medical Centre - Patient Participation Group.

GP Dr Agnelo Fernandes, said: "Mohan had been a patient at Parchmore Medical Centre for many years. He was a highly respected member and former chair of our Patient Participation Group. He was dedicated to improving services and serving his community and he will be sadly missed by all those who were privileged to have known him."

Brian Dickens, Parchmore Practice Manager said: "I only knew him for four years, but that was enough to see how much he gave to all parts of the community in Thornton Heath and wider.

"He was a great support and influence on me and I will miss him so much."

Mo had also been a member of Thornton Heath Library and Thornton Heath Regeneration steering groups as wells as serving as a school governor at St Mary's Catholic School .



He was a member of the Croydon Police Independent Advisory Group where he recently received a commendation for long and exemplary service.

Superintendent for Partnership and Neighbourhood Policing, Andy Brittain, said: "We were saddened to hear of the tragic death of Mohan Dhamrait OBE. He lost his battle with Covid, both the Sikh and wider communities have lost a true gentleman. He was our critical friend who supported MPS Croydon on the IAG. Our thoughts are with his family during this time."

OVER 7,000 VACCINES HAVE BEEN DISPENSED AT ST PAUL'S CHURCH

Over 7,000 Covid-19 vaccinations have been given at St Paul's Church in Thornton Heath with 11 local GP practices coming together to run the vaccination centre.

This is one of six vaccination sites in Croydon and GPs are central to delivering the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history, with over 70 per cent of the immunisations being administered by local GPs and their teams.

But St Paul's could not run these Covid-19 vaccination clinics without the amazing support of local volunteers.

The NHS has now offered the vaccine

to people aged 70 and over, care home residents and staff, front line health and care workers and clinically extremely vulnerable patients. Those aged 65 or over and those with underlying health conditions who are grouped as clinically vulnerable are now being offered the vaccine.

Dipti Gandhi, Clinical Director for Primary Care in North Croydon said "It has been wonderful to have vaccinated so many of our patients in just four short weeks. St Paul's is in the heart of the Thornton Heath community, and we are here to help protect that community and help everyone live long and vibrant lives."

Premier League football club Crystal



•George is 80 and lives in Croydon. He came to St Paul's Church by the 130 bus to get his vaccine.

George said "I get my flu jab every year. I did lots of reading before getting the vaccine and made an informed choice.

"I'm most looking forward to being happy again."



Palace has also opened its Selhurst Park ground as a NHS Covid-19 vaccination centre. The stadium is one of London's biggest vaccination venues.

Teresa Chapman, Business Lead for One Thornton Heath PCN who has led the organisation at St.Paul's said: "It has been a huge amount work, seven days a week, but it has all been worth it to see and hear how pleased our patients are being able to have their vaccine close to where they live."

Those over 70 who don't have an invitation letter can now book their appointment online at www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination or by calling 119. This booking system allows you to book an

• Ballroom dancer John David works as a fitness instructor visiting care homes to teach chair based exercises.

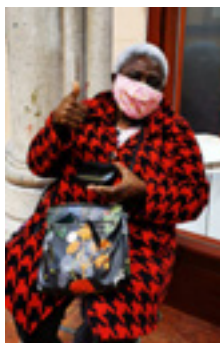
He read up a lot about the vaccine and booked his appointment as soon as he could. "I'm really looking forward to getting back to work with my care home residents, helping them to keep fit and active. Getting the vaccine is a really simple process and getting it done will help everybody look out for each other. I'm looking forward to my second dose."

appointment at a community vaccination centre like Selhurst Park or a local pharmacy vaccination centre.

Parchmore's Dr Agnelo Fernandes has a special message to those people over 70 who have not yet taken up their offer of a vaccine: "We know this can feel like a big decision, and some people feel unsure at first.

"We want to reassure everyone that if you or your loved one decides to have the vaccine, please don't hesitate to contact your GP to book your appointment."

For more info on the vaccine visit: www.swlondonccg.nhs.uk and click on 'Croydon'



• Princess is a local resident and decided to get the vaccine because: "I really enjoy going out. I get public transport a lot so I want to be safe. I'm really looking forward to things getting back to normal."

PUBLIC VACCINE DEBATE AIMS TO TO DISPEL MISINFORMATION AMONG BAME COMMUNITY

Medical professionals have been leading online vaccine debates urging members of the BAME 'don't die of ignorance' after a low take up of the jab.

As many as 50 per cent of the black, asian and minority ethnic community have refused to take the vaccine and health professionals have been answering questions at a series of seminars to dispel real fear, anxiety and mistrust.

A lot of the scaremongering has been generated on social media and doctors, nurses, faith and community leaders want decisions, to have or not to have the jab, to be informed by facts rather than misinformation, lies or hearsay. Among the more creative stories circulating is that the vaccine can change your physical appearance and that you could grow a tail!

A panel discussion organised by Croydon BME asking 'should we take the vaccine?' saw four doctors and a faith minister answer questions at the online event

which was attended by 800 people.

Croydon BME Forum has joined forces with local organisations in a bid to inform the black community about the Covid-19 vaccines following the recent low uptake.

A recent study by the University of Oxford and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that 21 per cent of black people over the age of 80, who are currently eligible to have the vaccine, have been vaccinated compared to 43 per cent of their white counterparts.

Other studies have found that BAME (black, Asian and minority ethnic) communities of all ages are unlikely to have the jab when offered. This is despite the fact black people are twice as likely to die from the virus.

Thornton Heath GP, Dr Agnelo Fernandes said, "Over 800 Croydon residents have now died of coronavirus and many more have been seriously ill. We now have a way of protecting ourselves. Getting

vaccinated gives us and our loved ones the best protection against this awful virus. These vaccines are safe and effective and it is an honour to be able to protect our patients and help local people get through this pandemic"

Andrew Brown, CEO at Croydon BME Forum, said: "Covid-19 has disproportionately affected people from ethnic minority backgrounds. Many more are dying from the virus, yet many from these communities are refusing to be vaccinated when asked.

"We know many have concerns, which is why they are hesitant to take the vaccine, so over the next few months we will be engaging with local communities to give them a chance to ask experts about the vaccine so that they can make an informed decision.

The BME Forum are also running more workshops over the next couple of months visit:www.cbmeforum.org.

Former mayor Humayun Kabir, who was hospitalised with Covid but has now recovered said: "I have been in touch with many elderly BAME community and particularly some Bangladeshi families in Croydon, some of them are elderly parents of second generation and I have explained to them the benefit of the vaccination. Most of them are fine and happy to be vaccinated. Those who were not keen, they were scared and brought the issues of lack of trial. However, since more people are now being vaccinated, the level of confidence and attitude is shifting positively in my view."

Cllr Kabir has organised a seminar with panel members and speakers representing many Croydon organisations among the Bangladeshi, Tamil, Hindu, and Afghanistan communities.

The Zoom meeting is on Thursday (Feb 22) 6.30pm to 8.30pm. For more information email Cllr Kabir on hr_kabir@hotmail.com

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE FACING COVID POVERTY QUEUE FOR FOOD BANK

By Mary Litchfield

As many as one hundred people will queue for hours outside the food bank on Beulah Road because they haven't got enough food to feed their families.

In March, His Grace food bank, was providing food assistance to 500 families. During the summer the numbers dipped but has now risen to almost 400 again.

Pastor Bola Thomas and her volunteers are exhausted after a year of feeding those in need. She admits: "It's just become very tiring now, because it's gone on for so long. I'm kind of afraid. It needs to stop very soon."

His Grace tries to give families enough food for three days as a minimum but has been struggling recently. Pastor Bola Thomas said, "There is some kind of shortage going on because we're not



receiving as many donations. That's not ideal but we just give them what we have."

Many people in need are turning to His Grace food bank for help, including pregnant mothers, the young and the old and the food bank is even receiving referrals from MacMillan Cancer Support and people 'transitioning from homelessness'.

Pastor Bola said: "People are queuing from around 11.30am even though we're not open until 2pm.We try to discourage them from doing that but they'd rather stay there just to make sure. Sometimes we've got 100 people in the queue."

Pastor Bola explained this lockdown has been particularly hard. They use to have five drivers who would collect supplies from about 14 supermarkets a week, but now they are down to just one.

Even before the pandemic the church operated a food bank once a week, serving around 100 people.

Pastor Bola explained that they encourage self-referrals because: "A lot of people fall into the net and they might need food for the next two weeks, and then they might be fine."

She added: "What we are seeing now are people that have lost their jobs and been made redundant. There are now people who used to donate to us that are now using our food bank. It really reflects our communities right now."

She added: "I want to say 'thank you everyone' from within the community that has stopped by His Grace and donated food to us.Thank you to individuals and to organisations that have donated to us. We still need more donations to stay open."

To help ring: 07946 546 507 or 0208 653 4433; www.hisgrace-evangelicaloutreach.co.uk or to make a contribution via PayPal: PayPal.me/HisGraceFoodBank

EMEGENCY APPEAL FOR PUPILS FACING FOOD AND FUEL POVERTY

▶ TURN FROM PAGE 1

She said: “The decision to create a fundraising page was not one which was made lightly. In the first few weeks of the spring term, the staff team witnessed increased levels of fear and uncertainty that the lockdown had created among families. It soon became apparent that the demands of lockdown were greater than we had anticipated. Families were struggling with day to day issues such as juggling work and home schooling along with how to pay for the additional costs of having children at home full time. “

In week one, Paxton opened its doors and offered spaces to a total of 15 children. The spaces were provided to support the children of critical workers and to provide places for children with EHCPs (Education, Health and Care Plans), as well as those who are considered vulnerable. At the end of week five, those spaces have now increased to 60.

Since January, children, families and the staff team of Paxton have tested positive for COVID-19 and during one week, 50 per cent of the staff team were at home either self-isolating or having tested positive, but the school still remained open to provide places for children of



critical workers, those with EHCPs and those considered vulnerable.

The school is raising funds to provide bespoke support to those families that need it it most to spend on food vouchers for local supermarkets that can be used in store or online for families who are not eligible for Free School Meals but in need of support to feed their children.

As well as internet access to enable better access to remote learning; support in paying utility bills; specialist equipment and therapy services for SEN student and resources and crafts to enable the students to progress in their learning while at home.

Ms Moses added: “As headteacher, I am incredibly proud to be leading Paxton on its journey at this time but I recognise the fear and uncertainty families are facing

have requested one.

Each week, members of the teaching staff make phone calls home to listen to the children read and to keep in contact with families. Where concerns are raised or families request additional support, the Deputy head and Special Educational Needs Coordinator then phone home to support the families further and offer additional help to meet their needs.

Ms Moses said: “As a school, we also work with the local authority to ensure that all families are supported and, wherever possible, to ensure there is no break in the provision during this challenging time.

“The past five weeks have not been easy but the staff have worked together to support each other and do their best. We continue to ensure that we meet the needs of the children in providing an education, whether remotely or in school, that children’s emotional needs are met, and that families have the basic resources including the Home Learning packs, to enable the children to flourish and continue to learn.”

During the Autumn term, Paxton moved from its temporary site on Brigstock Road into its new permanent build on London Road , filled with state-of-the-art facilities.

The school has been inundated with requests to loan a device for children to access their learning remotely and to date the DfE have provided 49 devices and the school has been able to loan a device to all the families who

app.investmycommunity.com/paxton-academy-sports-and-science-2457

BARBER FINED

A follow up second visit showed ‘a lot more’ were complying, said police.

Last month members of the SNT team also had to self isolate after possible contact with the virus and a spokesman said: “It does enforce the message we are putting out there to comply with the regulations as we are putting ourselves at risk to reduce the spread.”

On Friday, (12 February) police responded to reports of a unlawful gathering in Gilsland Road, Thornton Heath. Officers attended and found eight people at the address in violation of Covid restrictions.

A 57-year-old man was identified as the organiser of the gathering and was reported for consideration of a fixed penalty notice.

He was also issued with a community resolution for possession of a small amount of cannabis.

Back in September speaking at the Thornton Heath ward panel meeting Sergeant Andy Smith said it was “surprising how much residents of Thornton Heath just didn’t give a hoot about the law or about the regulations.

He said: “The conversations I had with some people blew my mind.

“They just didn’t care or believe Covid existed or said ‘well it won’t effect me’ actually it ‘definitely’ will because people have died on this road from this infection or it’s Bill Gates’ fault. Those kind of conversations you can’t win. That doesn’t speak entirely for the whole population of Thornton Heath but it definitely speaks for a chunk of it.”

FILM LAYS BEAR THE SHOCKING IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Film maker Kaitlyn Boxall survived life at the hands of a violent father thanks only to the bravery and love of her mother who protected her while pregnant from domestic abuse.



Her film Behind Closed Doors was developed to raise awareness and empower victims of domestic abuse to escape their life of violence.

The story of the main character Lisa Crawford is inspired by her mother Marisa’s shocking ordeal.

“Once he realised that she was gone, he took her to court for parental responsibility just to spite her. Till this very day, he has never used it and has never ever been a part of my life. He only ever wanted pure control.”

There is now more help available to victims of domestic violence but the lockdowns have led to a huge rise in cases. The government recently backed a new campaign where domestic abuse victims can “Ask for Ani” at pharmacies as part of a codeword scheme to indicate they need help.



Kaitlyn added: “My mother’s dear friend, Noel, was her hero. He as an outsider, could plainly see the bruises on the back of her ears and head. He would let her stay at his as a place of safety. However, of course, when she returned home, she would have to go through another beating. The rest of her bruises were always covered up with

clothes and she felt too ashamed to confide in anyone.

Recently Marisa tried to trace Noel on Facebook to thank him but sadly he had passed. She was however able to share with his family her eternal gratitude for his support.

Kaitlyn added: “The rates of domestic abuse have spiked since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown, and it is horrific. Mum was very proud of the film, but it was a hard watch for her. She wants to plead to every woman, that you can get out of it!

Twenty years ago, there was very little help. She spent two years in a refuge, and today she now says, “To leave your house keys on the table, and go to a refuge is tough. To live a lifetime of abuse, where your children see you being beaten, is far, far worse.

“My mother met many women during her time at the refuge. She is so thankful that I was only three weeks old. So, I, myself, do not hold any memories of those dark times. Many women in the refuge, had older children, who had already witnessed so much.

“I pledge to any victims; do not let your children witness such horrific actions of violence. I understand it can be difficult, but a lifetime of abuse can be changed to a lifetime of happiness. You can do it! It is heart-breaking, as you probably still love your abuser, because they make it seem normal. You end up knowing no different.”

Watch Behind Closed Doors at: <https://filmfreeway.com/BehindClosedDoors783>

ACTRESS CREATES WINNING COMEDY ABOUT LIFE, LOVE AND FAMILY

An local actresses comedy about life, love and family which has has been described as The Royle Family meets Gavin and Stacey has been picked up by a TV station.

Tara Ellis, who has worked in The West End, in film and TV playing Nick Cotton’s wife in Eastenders co-created, produced and starred in a web-series; Hand-to-mouth.

During lockdown the heart warming tale, which cost just £200 to make, was picked up by London Live and re-edited for the TV as a 45minute one off show which was screened last month.

Tara, a resident of Thornton Heath for the last 10 years explained the inspiration for the show: “Myself and my friend Scott Baker decided, why wait around for the phone to ring when we could create something ourselves?

“After thrashing around with lots of ideas we came up with Hand-to-Mouth.

A working- class comedy about love, life and family...on a budget.

“We wanted to portray real people, the people in our family, the people down the pub, people we grew up with. Everyone knows a “Dave and Lisa”.

“We discussed, characters, plot lines and dialogue and then Scott went away and came up with six sweet, heart-warming scripts.”

As they were both completely non-technical and after a failed attempt at filming on a phone, Scott was fortunate enough to bump in to an old school friend who provided the technical input and they were away.

The crew and equipment worked for absolutely noting but ‘love and belief’ in the project, and the friends even pulled in



favours from actor friends.

Scott’s niece, a non-actor, was roped in to play Tara’s on screen daughter and her niece produced the logo for the show.

Scott’s band ‘The Fabulous Lounge Swingers’, with another of his nieces created the sound track for the show..

Tara jokes “The shoot itself was akin to the shoot of Jaws! What could go wrong did. We had limited time because of borrowed equipment, so we were chasing light around a garden, dealing with technical malfunctions and a building site at the bottom of the garden,”

In Croydon during the first lockdown a campaign was launched for victims experiencing domestic abuse to ask staff in participating stores including Lidl and Tesco in Thornton Heath for access to a phone, to use to call for support and advice.

Statistics revealed in the six weeks up to 19 April there were a shocking 200 domestic abuse arrests – almost five a day – in Croydon.

The police were also called to 561 domestic abuse offences in the borough during this period – around 13 offences a day.

Posters publicising where domestic abuse victims can seek help were put up in every one of the borough’s 400 off-licences and supermarkets.

A review by Croydon Safeguarding Children Board in February 2019 of the experiences of 60 children in the borough – many of whom have been criminally or sexually exploited, and involved in serious violence found domestic violence had featured in 42 per cent of cases with 23 of the children coming to the notice of the police due to reports of domestic abuse.

Research confirms that exposure to domestic abuse as a child can have a lifelong impact on not only a child’s development but their ability to learn and form relationships. It can also impact on their behaviour. If you need help, support or advice please call the FJC on 020 8688 0100. Those needing support outside of the centre’s opening hours can call the free 24-hour National Domestic Abuse Hotline on 0808 2000 247. In an emergency, call the police on 999.



“We are so grateful to London Live for screening it, it goes to a whole new level when you see it on TV

“Scott and I are having a virtual meeting to brain-storm the next series.

“We have had some amazing feedback from the public ‘It’s like The Royale Family’ ‘Just stumbled upon this little sitcom on London Live, it’s like This Life’, ‘lovely characters, you don’t mind spending a bit of time in their company’.

“We strongly believe there’s legs in this show and again we’re not going to wait around.”

SCHOOL MINI BUS DISTRIBUTES AID

Teachers at secondary school have been driving around the borough in a mini bus dropping off exercise books, food parcels and delivering laptops to students in need.



St Mary’s Catholic High School in West Croydon used its Twitter feed to announce to its Thornton Heath pupils that staff were out and about in the St Mary’s bus and if they wanted a new exercise book: “Just ask!”

St Mary’s successfully applied for a grant through the Catholic Children’s Society which along with the laptops from the Department for Education, has enabled it to provide laptops to many students who - for various reasons - do not have access to one at home.

St Mary’s are still looking in to ways to continue to source laptops and mobile devices to ensure all our students have access to our remote learning. The bus has also been delivering food parcels to families in need from the school.

A St Mary’s spokesman said: “Next week is half term, which can be a difficult time for families, particularly now because of the pandemic.

HOMESCHOOLING IN HOW TO MAKE A SLEEP POD FOR THE HOMELESS

A mum used lockdown lesson time to teach her daughters how to build a sleep pod so they could imagine what it would be like if they didn’t have a roof over their heads and had to live outdoors in freezing temperatures.

Urzsula Soltys encouraged daughters - Lena, 10, and Stefania, eight, (pictured in Grangewood Park) to put together these tents and think about being homeless as part of their homeschooling.

The sleep pods which cost £30 are part of an initiative run by south London charity SleepPod, which aims to provide the emergency aid to protect rough sleepers from the rain and wind.

Urzsula said: “I thought helping to build sleep pods would be a great home learning opportunity for the kids. We picked up the materials from the charity Sleep Pod and with their easy instructions we made three tents in one afternoon. We have learned about the science of



insulating materials and simple design which can make a difference in someone’s life. ”

Urzsula added: “I told my daughters we were having another lesson in the woods in Grangewood Park. I asked them to imagine that they wouldn’t be able to return home to warm up and to think about the people that spend nights outside on the streets . I think that was the best homeschooling experience they’ve had during lock down.”

During the second wave more than 1,500 newly-homeless were among 3,307 found sleeping rough in London from October to December. This has also resulted in an “explosion” of Covid-19 with more than double the number of cases recorded in rough sleepers in January than across the whole of 2020.

For more information visit: www.fundsurfer.com/crowdfund/sleep-pod-fundraising-campaign

COUNCIL IN LAST CHANCE SALON AS GOVERNMENT BAILS IT OUT BUT WARNS IT COULD STILL SEND IN COMMISSIONERS TO TAKE CONTROL

A government review into the financial collapse of Croydon Council has exposed serious management and leadership failings.

Most seriously, the report uncovers the culture that created the financial crisis, revealing that many council officers were 'asked to re-word' reports to present the most favourable picture'.

It was evident that the 'tone' of many of financial reports to the ruling Labour cabinet "did not accurately reflect the seriousness of the Council's financial position," it said.

The report also stated that statutory officers, citing the former £220,000 a year chief executive Jo Negrini, along with director of finance Lisa Taylor and monitoring officer Jacqueline Harris-Baker, were 'inexperienced' and were each in their roles for the first time

However it concluded there was "no credible alternative" to the £150million capitalisation direction the council is seeking to bring its books back into balance this year and next.

But in a veiled threat it said: "In the event of a failure by the council to demonstrate significant progress, a more formal statutory intervention will be considered, including the appointment of commissioners."

The review team noted that political assurance, through the scrutiny and audit committees had also failed. It said statutory officers 'did not assert their

RESIDENTS GET TO VOTE FOR WHO THEY WANT TO RUN CROYDON COUNCIL

Residents will get to decide whether Croydon Council is controlled by the largest political group or by an individual determined by a popular vote in a referendum in October.

The minister for regional growth and local government, Luke Hall had said the referendum on whether Croydon Council should change the way it is run should be held on May 6 to coincide with the London Mayor and GLA elections

However, Labour controlled Croydon council at an extraordinary meeting (Feb 8) pushed through a move delaying a borough-wide referendum on a directly elected mayor until October 7.

A paper presented to the meeting said this standalone poll was expected to cost £650,000 while holding the referendum alongside May's elections would be in the region of £400,000 to £500,000.

However, Council leader Hamida Ali said if the referendum had been held in May it would have needed to verify the 17,000 people who had signed a cross party supported petition collected by campaign group DEMOC.

As they had now agreed the premise of the petition there was no need to verify the signatures so instead, she said here would be a saving of £20,000. Cllr Ali said

powers' and councillors were not 'forceful in their challenge'

The review said "arguably" the section 114 notice issued by Lisa Taylor in November should have been issued earlier and found former leader Tony Newman had been able to "create an inner circle of a small number of cabinet members, who have been very controlling in their management of the council and its finances".

The review, which took place in October involved carrying out more than 60 interviews with staff and councillors.

The report said: "There seems to be a unanimity of view that these failings are attributable to the poor leadership and poor management of the council over a number of years."

The report added that the council is not in denial about 'the perilousness of its position' but there is anger from staff that the council has been led to the situation.

Last month it was announced that a Government-appointed improvement and assurance panel will be created to watch over Croydon Council and feedback directly to secretary of state Robert Jenrick and MHCLG on a quarterly basis.

Croydon leader Hamida Ali welcomed the review team's recognition of the extensive action: "we are already undertaking to tackle our financial challenges, and the determination shared by my cabinet, myself, and officers throughout the organisation, to put things right."



Labour's approach was 'more responsive' to residents and 'more cost effective' but opposition councillor Lynne Hale described the Labour move as a "sneaky motion of dither and delay"

Cllr Ali said Labour welcomed the appetite for a referendum debate but that the over-riding focus had to be on stabilising the council's financial position.

She said surely residents and government would agree that the council should secure a balanced budget in the first instance before turning its mind to funding and facilitating the referendum.

She also pointed out that the lockdown would have had a significant impact on the referendum campaign if it were held in May and that the October date would allow a full and proactive engagement enabling residents to make a fully informed decision.

Currently Croydon uses the leader and cabinet model – this means the council leader is chosen by members of the ruling party but the other option on the ballot – the elected mayor model – would mean the mayor would replace the council leader and be chosen by Croydon voters.

If Croydon voters favour a directly-elected mayor, an election for that position would be held in May 2022.

COUNCIL LOOKS FOR BUYER FOR CONTROVERSIAL BXB AS IT 'WINDS IT DOWN'

The council is preparing to 'wind down' Brick by Brick with housing schemes in the pipeline including the redevelopment of garages in Thornton Heath scrapped.



More than 70 schemes have been recommended for shelving. Plans to transform 16 neglected garages behind Atlanta Court on Parchmore Road, in to 20 one and two bed flats for council rent, which had planning permission are among those which will now not go ahead.

The council is exploring the sale of the company which the council loaned £200million but has failed to pay any dividends or interest which was cited as one of the reasons why the council had to issue the section 114.

The government review team was highly critical of the council's oversight of Brick by Brick particularly its lack of financial governance. Now the council is proposing to sell off some of the sites earmarked for BxB developments.

Meanwhile, taxpayers are also going to be left to foot the multi-million cost of refurbishing Croydon arts venue Fairfield Halls, as the council will not be able to recover the £59 million loan given to the developer for the refurbishment of Fairfield Halls and adjoining housing development.

It cost at least £42 million to refurbish the venue and the idea was that the neighbouring College Green development of more than 400 flats would cover these costs.

Papers which went to the the council's scrutiny committee said: 'The council has had one approach from an interested party and it is suggested that this be

Croydon Council will have to pay out £2,400 a day for a new improvement panel brought in by the Government to oversee the authority as it battles through a financial crisis.

The Improvement and Assurance Panel will be in place until March 2024 and will report back to the MHCLG and the secretary of state Robert Jenrick on the progress of the council.

An appointment letter from Catherine Frances to the chair of the new Improvement and Assurance Panel, Tony McArdle, outlines the terms of reference and says panel members will be paid a fee of £600 to £800 per day plus reasonable expenses, including travel and subsistence.

The panel is made up of three members, meaning that if each of them charges £800 a day it will cost Croydon Council £2,400 for each day they work.

followed up to see on what terms a disposal might be possible'.

A report by PricewaterhouseCoopers in to the council's commercial interests recommended Colm Lacey, stand down as director but he has remained as chief executive of Brick By Brick

Mr Lacey has no private sector experience and was previously employed as Croydon's director of development.

The Chronicle asked ING Media, a leading PR agency which the council oddly pays to represent Brick by Brick's media interests for an interview with Mr Lacey but it said: "As you can imagine Colm is very busy right now and not available for interviews."

- After a year of sitting empty shared ownership homes in BxB flagship Flora Court development in Thornton Heath are finally being marketed by SO Resi Agency, part of Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing, after doing a partnership deal with BxB.

.Over the launch weekend 50 per cent of the 23 empty one and two bedroom 'affordable homes' were reserved in the development on Chipstead Road.

Previously BxB had sold just one of the apartments after it had to suspend all sales because it emerged lenders would not provide mortgages under shared ownership schemes on its properties because the company was not a 'registered provider'.

The members of the panel are:

- Chair and governance lead – Tony McArdle, ex-CEO of Lincolnshire CC and currently lead commissioner at Northamptonshire County Council
- Finance lead – Margaret Lee, currently executive director, corporate and customer services and previously chief financial officer Essex CC); and
- Commercial and asset disposal – Phil Brookes (Crown Representative).

It isn't yet known how often the panel will meet, this is something still being discussed by Croydon Council.

The terms of reference say that the number of days of advice provided by each board member over 12 months can be agreed in advance by the council and gives two examples.



CROYDON IN CRISIS: FORMER COUNCIL LEADERSHIP TEAM SUSPENDED

The former council leader and cabinet lead for finance Tony Newman and Simon Hall were last week suspended from the Labour party just days after the majority of the council's executive team was also suspended from their posts including the director of finance.

Newman and Hall (pictured), have only ever provided written answers to the media for the sorry state they have left the borough's finances in and took the opportunity to blame the council's woes on years of austerity, Tory cuts and Covid-19 rather than personal failings.

However, the 'administrative suspension' imposed by the Labour Party pending an inquiry, does not affect Newman and Hall's positions as councillors. But they are banned from taking part in Labour Party business, including policy meetings.

Hall was first to resign from the council citing 'personal reasons' followed by Newman who resigned in October despite a vote of confidence in him by his Labour group which he had led for 15 years .

Director of finance Lisa Taylor (pictured), who issued the Section 114 declaring the



council bankrupt, is understood to have been suspended from her duties along with the executive director of place Shifa Mustafa, executive director of localities Hazel Simmonds and executive director of health, wellbeing and adults Guy Van Dichele.

The suspensions are understood to have followed the receipt of a report by the Local Government Association into senior management actions between April 2017 and September 2020 but the council has made no official comment or statement about the suspensions.

Only Interim chief executive Katherine Kerswell and interim director of children, families and education Debbie Jones, appointed by Ms Kerswell after joining in September, remain in post.

All those suspended served under former chief executive Jo Negrini who left the council in August with a £440,000 settlement package amid mounting concern over its financial position.

The executive director of resources and monitoring officer Jacqueline Harris-Baker, the other permanent member of the senior management team, is understood to have gone on sick leave in recent days.

CROYDON DOES THIRD U-TURN ON SALE OF LODGE

▶ TURN FROM PAGE1

until March 1 In the case of Heath Lodge this is the third time the council has tried to sell the Victorian park building. Previously the council had assured the Friends of Grangewood Park that at least 20 per cent of any sale would be ploughed back in to improving the park.

In January last year the council advertised, its plans to dispose of Heath Lodge and part of 195 square metre strip of land for access to the property, in the Sutton Guardian on Boxing Day without any consultation with the FoGP.

The council was forced into an embarrassing u-turn after over 3,000 residents signed a petition opposing it with local ward councillors promising that it would be up to residents what happened to the building.

On January 6 2020, the council issued a statement saying that the strong public opposition was reason it had decided not to sell the building or land, adding: "... Croydon Council's elected members and officers will work with local people over the coming months to find a viable solution the community supports."

Councillor Karen Jewitt responded at the time saying she was "delighted" with the news along with fellow Thornton Heath councillors Pat Clouder and Callton Young, who had objected to the strip of land being 'disposed of'.

CROYDON COUNCIL STAFF TAKE THE BISCUIT OVER CLAIMS FOR EXPENSES

Croydon Council has been criticised for having little to no controls in place to prevent fraudulent staff expense and mileage claims with employees submitting questionable claims for biscuits, birthday cakes and balloons.

The council's systems were so weak, said auditors Mazars in the internal audit, that there was a 'high risk' of abuse resulting in financial loss and or reputational damage with it recommending immediate management action.

Auditors tested a sample of 20 approved expenses claims and found in a quarter of cases expenses were incorrectly categorised and, in some instances, should not have been claimed at all.

The review identified that some of the expenses had been paid to staff in 'contravention' of the council's own expenses policy and these 'misrepresentations' could have resulted in disciplinary action or the sack.

Among a sample reviewed by Mazars they found an emergency housing interventions officer had billed the council for £143.48, which included two birthday cakes costing £29.98 and £40 for event balloons; while a democratic services officer had claimed for £45.10 which included chocolate biscuits from Sainsbury's for £3.90 and £22.60 of food from Stuffins.

The expenses which would have been signed off by a manager were also wrongly categorised and claimed as being expenses for 'taxis'.



Staff were required to acknowledge that they had read and understood the council's expense policy before submitting the claims, said the report.

There were also examples where officers had incorrectly claimed goods for services and service users as business expenses instead of claiming using the council's ad hoc payment process.

These included £302.40 for trampolining tickets for young people, £141.94 for the purchase of tokens and snacks for a summer school for refugees and unaccompanied minors, £73.60 for wine for an event and £73.59 for food for a summer garden party.

One project officer in Placemaking billed the council for £339 for their chartered membership to the Landscape Institute describing it as 'medical fees' even though it is against the expenses policy for the council to pay these fees.

The review was published in February

H&S IN PARKS 'NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE'

A damning report of health and safety in Croydon's parks has revealed the council failed to carry out inspections and risk assessments which could have led to accidents and injuries.

A review identified significant weaknesses in key areas in the inspections of playground equipment, paths, lighting and the facilities within the borough's parks and greenspaces. The council was also criticised for not having a Parks Strategy or management plan for its parks and green spaces.

The highly critical internal review by auditors Mazars revealed more than half of the weekly visual playground inspection reports – of a sample of ten parks – for the months of October, November 2019 and January 2020, were missing.

Auditors were told that the department didn't have the staffing levels to carry out the required risk assessments but management said they were aiming to put in place a proposed action plan to ensure the Health and Safety of its parks and greenspaces was 'fit for purpose' by September 2021.

Worryingly, the report also identified that fire risk assessments of park buildings were not regularly reviewed putting the council in breach of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

EMPTY 1960s OFFICE BLOCK TO BE CONVERTED IN TO HOUSING UNITS

The millionaire owner of Ambassador House who paid just £300,000 for it nine years ago at auction has been given prior approval to convert six floors of the empty office block opposite Thornton Heath station in to 66 one and two bedroom units.

Sajid Bashir submitted an application on April 3 under permitted development rights, which is a government scheme allowing certain types of change of use such as B1 to C3 (from offices to dwellings), to be carried out without applying for planning permission.

The application proposes accommodation for 48 one bed and 18 two bed units with anticipated occupancy for 150 people by converting the second, third, fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth floors and includes parking and cycle storage.

Mr Bashir is the CEO of Copperstones Ltd, which an upmarket estate agents more used to marketing property in more salubrious surroundings including the Battersea Powerstation development and Dubai.

His company is presently marketing the Aston Martin Residences, in Miami (pictured) which boasts access to a super yacht marina, and potentially access to butler services that will ferry residents to a private, exclusive beach.

The run down 1960s office block which was once a busy business hub has sat empty for years and the only occupants in recent times apart from pigeons were an arts collective who briefly squatted the building in 2019.

Last year workmen began stripping back the interior of the building and broken windows have been patched up with artwork left behind by the squatters. The housing is described as units rather than apartments so its unclear who they are intended for but they will be for the rental

market not for sale.

Network Rail holds the freehold for the site and The Chronicle understands there is a condition on the lease which would prohibit Mr Bashir from carving up the building for sale as individual properties.

The drawings show two bedroom 'units' for three people with two toilets with a floor space of 66.8sqm. The average one bedroom for two people has a floorspace of 50.17sqm. There is a minimum government space standard for new homes which is 50sqm metres for two person one bedroom flat and 61sqm for a three person two bed.

Mr Bashir won't be able to convert two of the floors as easily as they are D1 use, so classified as community use, which is afforded "protected" status - meaning the applicant is unable to change the use of the property without a full planning application being made.

The letter from Mr Bashir's planning consultant, Jon Murch, sets the council a 56 day deadline from the date of receipt of the application to confirm the case but it took the council until last month to provide prior approval.

The conditions attached include an S106 agreement and Community Interest Levy and the council makes reference to ensuring the floors and ceilings are properly insulated to prevent noise.

In a letter from Mr Murch of Davies Murch, acting for Copperstones Ltd, he writes: "Whilst the quantum of proposed homes is not a matter for consideration as part of this application, it is nevertheless provided for completeness.."



Mr Murch goes on to state: "The scheme can be implemented with no changes to the exterior of the building. However, it is the applicant's intention that a planning application will be submitted in due course to improve the exterior of the building."

The application is for change of use and conversion of the second, third, fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth floors within Ambassador House from Class B1 to C3.

These floors are unused and were previously used as offices until they were vacated years ago. The remaining floors: fourth and seventh, are also vacant but are D1 use. The residential accommodation will be able to utilise the 54 car parking spaces associated with the previous office building.

The Chronicle reported in 2019 that Mr Bashir, who also owns Red Wing which is based offshore, had avoided paying almost £300,000 in business rates because of a legal loophole. Ambassador House was sold at auction in October 2012 due to liquidation. Mr Bashir acquired the balance of the 120 year lease from December 1967.

As usual The Chronicle contacted a representative of Copperstones to find out more about the Ambassador House plans but got no response.

PLANS TO BUILD IN GARDEN OF HISTORIC HOUSE WITHDRAWN



A planning application to build in the back garden of one of Thornton Heath's oldest houses has been withdrawn.

The Chronicle reported in the last edition proposals to build two, two-storey semi detached houses at the rear of Berwick Lodge, at 31 St Paul's Road, which had received 13 objections.

The property owner Mohamed Bharwani, who is a pharmacist by occupation and is the director of a number of property management companies, withdrew the application prior to a decision being made by planners.

The Victorian property is currently used as a HMO (House of Multiple Occupancy) having been converted in to five apartments with three one bedrooms, a two bedroom and studio flat.

St Paul's is designated as a Local Area of Special Character because of the architecture and date of the properties.

BUILDING FIRM FINED £5K FOR FLYTIPPING



A Bensham Grove building firm has been fined £5,000 after being found guilty of fly-tipping in a Kent village.

Waste, including wood, glass, plastics, carpet, unit panels, black bags, cardboard, plastic tubing, insulation foam, and waste food and wrapping was found dumped in Denton.

An environmental enforcement officer attended the fly tip which was reported in August 2019 and found the waste was linked to Diligent Developments Limited.

The court action was brought by Dover District Council who asked the company to attend an interview but did not do so, the council explained.

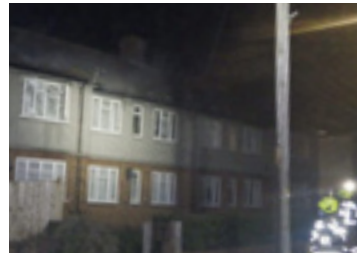
When no contact was received to a final letter the authority took the matter to court and the company was found guilty in its absence.

Last month Folkestone Magistrates Court ordered Diligent to pay costs of £1,689 and a victim surcharge of £181, making a total bill of £6,870.

ARSON SUSPECT TASERED AFTER FIREFIGHTER HOSPITALISED IN ATTACK

Police officers called to reports that a firefighter had been assaulted tasered a 53-year-old man who was acting aggressively and detained him on suspicion of arson.

The firefighter could have sustained a serious head injury if not for his helmet after he was attacked while tackling a blaze at a block of flats in Kensington Avenue.



London Mayor Sadiq Khan said it was "appalling" that a firefighter had been "violently attacked".

The assault in the early hours of January 26, was described as 'abhorrent, unprovoked' and 'completely unacceptable' by fire chief Richard Mills.

The firefighter suffered a head injury and was taken to a south London hospital as a precaution.

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: "Upon arrival a man was acting aggressively and Taser was deployed to detain him. A 53-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of attempted grievous bodily harm, assaulting an emergency worker and arson with intent to endanger life."

Four fire engines and around 25 firefighters were called to a fire which broke out on the first floor of the two-storey block just after midnight with crews from Norbury and West Norwood gaining control of the fire by 1.37am.

Deputy Fire Commissioner Mills said: "This abhorrent and unprovoked attack on a firefighter is completely unacceptable, but during a global pandemic when all emergency services workers are going above and beyond to serve the public it is even more shocking."

"We take all attacks on our firefighters incredibly seriously.

"We will be working with the Metropolitan Police Service to assist with their investigation."

AIR AMBULANCE RESPONDS AS MOPED IN COLLISON WITH BIN LORRY IS RESCUED

This is the dramatic moment the Air Ambulance readies itself to land as emergency services rush to the aid of moped rider involved in a collision with a bin lorry.

The scene was screened off while paramedics helped the injured woman who was taken to a major trauma unit.

The accident happened at the Parchmore Road junction with St Paul's and Fernham Road on January 28 at 10.05am.

Eyewitnesses said the moped had gone under the lorry.

The air ambulance was scrambled along with police and London Fire Brigade. A London Ambulance Service spokesperson said: "We sent an ambulance crew, a medic

in a car, and an incident response officer. We also dispatched London's Air Ambulance.

"A woman was treated at the scene and taken to a major trauma centre as a priority." The woman's condition has been described as: "

This is not the first time there has been an accident at the junction.



Gerrie Ozah

POLICE OFFICERS INJURED

Two police officers were taken to hospital after they were injured after arresting a suspect.

Officers were were called to Norbury Avenue at 7.05pm after reports of two men breaking in to a car.

A man was detained after he struggled with officers as they tried to arrest him at the scene.

Two officers were taken to hospital with non life-threatening injuries.

The man was arrested on suspicion of assault on emergency worker.

GUNS AND BULLETS SEIZED



Guns and dozens of bullets were recovered and seized following a raid in Thornton Heath.

Officers from the Specialist Crime Command raided an address on Norbury Avenue and recovered two firearms and 38 bullets shortly before 3.50pm on Tuesday January 26.

A 51-year-old man was arrested at the scene for possession of firearms and has been taken into custody.

TEENAGER ARRESTED WITH WEAPON

A 19-year-old was arrested and charged with possession of this Rambo-style knife.

Nickalas Mighten, 19, of Grange Park Road was a passenger on a moped which was intercepted by the Violence Suppression Unit which was patrolling in Croydon on December 29.

Mighten was due to appear at Croydon Magistrates' Court charged with possession of an offensive weapon in a public place.

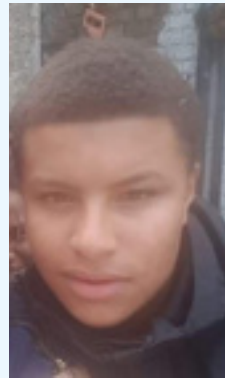
He was arrested in Boswell Road.

MURDER CHARGE

Detectives investigating the murder of a teenager from Thornton Heath have charged a man with his murder.

Kyall Parnell was 17 when he was fatally stabbed in the heart after an altercation on the number 36 bus at Tulse Hill on New Year's Eve 2017.

The Crown Prosecution Service had earlier decided not to press charges as prosecutors argued it was a case of self-defence but 19-year-old Denique Newell was arrested on Monday and charged with the murder.



PLANNERS USE NEW RULES TO TAKE TOUGH STANCE ON HMOS

The council is using new rules to reject applications to carve up family homes in Thornton Heath and turn them in to Houses of Multiple Occupancy.

The Article 4 planning restriction was introduced by the council in January last year and requires owners to seek planning permission for the change of use to a HMO.

Already a number of applications have been turned down by planners with each receiving multiple objections from Thornton Heath residents.

Previously multi-bedroom properties could be converted to small HMOs (houses occupied by between three and six unrelated individuals) under permitted development – which meant planning consent was not required for the change but now it is.



Local councillor Karen Jewitt is objecting to all those in Thornton Heath and explains why: "As a councillor in a ward with a number of HMOs, I was delighted that small HMOs now have to have planning permission.

"It has certainly stopped more of these tiny, cramped

developments coming onto the housing market."

"Some landlords used the old loophole in the planning legislation to cram as many people as possible into the average Thornton Heath three bed house."

"Now that is a thing of the past. People who live in HMOs deserve decent housing conditions just like everyone else."

The Chronicle reported in February last year that London Fire Brigade provided the council with data that showed there had been 21 HMO specific related fires since January 2015 with the council's HMO team issuing over 600 improvement notices in three years. In addition to overcrowding, HMOs have attracted complaints about increased anti-social behaviour, excessive litter, fly tipping and parking.

Those that have been refused in recent months include:

- Plans to convert a ground floor flat in to a HMO for six occupants at 1 Milner Road which received 17 objections.
- Change of use of a house to a HMO for three to six people at 12 Frant Road.
- The conversion of 38 Woodville Road in to a HMO for seven occupants which has already received objections.
- Retrospective permission for change of use of 102 Richmond Road (pictured) which has been operating as a HMO for more than a year providing rooms to the socially excluded as part of a scheme managed by not for profit Chatfield Housing, which is used for referrals by the Single Homeless Service Team (SHS) at Croydon Council.
- In other planning news: Vivien Folefac has put in an application for change of use of a four bedroom semi at 71 Melfort Road for use as a care home.

PALACE'S HUMATARIAN EFFORT TO FEED 27,000



A 'mind-blowing' effort providing thousands of local people in need with healthy and nutritious food has won the praise of premierships football player Joel Ward

The CPFC right back visited the Palace Kitchen, which it's just been confirmed will continue

to feed families struggling throughout February, and helped prepare meals.

Since being launched last year, Palace Kitchen has delivered more than 27,000 meals, providing a lifeline to vulnerable individuals and families, including the elderly, those in emergency housing

and the homeless.

Club chefs prepare around 350 food parcels a day, four days a week, which are distributed by project partner City Harvest.

Joel said the operation was 'mind blowing' adding: "It shows the heart of people in the club and outside of the club who are willing to donate and give something to help others. It restores your faith in humanity."

"It knocks you back a bit to see the scale of the need even in this local area."

The Palace Kitchen was set up with funding from the club and individual shareholders, to cover the costs of purchasing fresh ingredients, preparing nutritious meals and safely packing and labelling them ready for collection and distribution.

Sarah, a local mother, was one of Palace Kitchen's earliest recipients last spring, having lost her job at the start of lockdown whilst pregnant and with a two-year-old daughter at home.

She said: "The food we get is lovely, I'm pregnant and I don't have the energy to cook for the family, so the meals are amazing and they are delicious and healthy too. To know that Crystal Palace is providing for us is so nice and it's such a great help for my family."

More than £10,000 has since been raised through the generosity of Palace fans, who have donated through a JustGiving page www.justgiving.com/campaign/palacekitchen to help fund this amazing project.

Meals from the Palace Kitchen have been distributed to ten local charities and organisations identified by Croydon Council, including the Legacy Youth Zone, on Whitehorse Road which supports local families in poverty.

At the end of January Legacy reached a milestone of distributing 10,000 meals with its Big Love Kitchen Cares Project preparing daily hot meals

ROUND THE CLOCK SUPPORT FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY CANCER

A leading charity is urging everyone affected by cancer to make use of its round-the-clock support phone line during the pandemic after it emerged patients in London are living through the worst possible 'groundhog day' as Covid-19 rates spark growing concerns about their physical and mental health.

Recent research by Macmillan Cancer Support has revealed the continuing toll of the ongoing coronavirus crisis on people with cancer, with many facing anxiety, disruption to care, and the disconcerting experience of going through diagnosis and treatment alone.



Darren Randon from Thornton Heath, who cared for his mum Cheryl when she was diagnosed with Neuroendocrine tumours in 2017, spoke of the support she had received from Macmillan: "My mum accessed the Macmillan Support Line and was left completely in awe of the information and financial support she received."

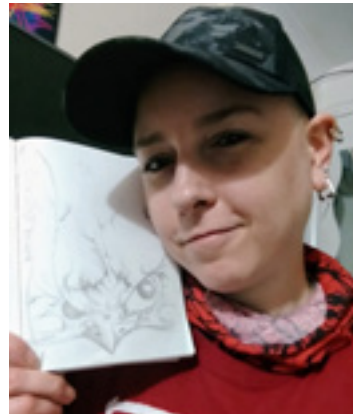
The phone line is manned by specially trained cancer nurses and counsellors who are there for anyone affected by or worried about cancer, every day of the week.

Macmillan estimates that around a quarter of a million people with cancer in the UK are having to shield with at least 150,000 people newly diagnosed with cancer since March and tens of thousands of people missing a cancer diagnosis they would otherwise have received, because of the impact of the pandemic.

Chris Payne, Support Line Manager at Macmillan Cancer Support, said: "For many, this pandemic feels like the worst possible Groundhog Day. We want them to know that they aren't alone."

Anyone in need of cancer support can call the Macmillan Support Line on 0808 808 00 00, or visit www.community.macmillan.org.uk

NEW CHILDREN'S BOOK: FEATURING BEA AND THE BUTTERSQUELCH



A new book penned by a local author features an imaginary creature called the Buttersquelch who befriends an eight-year-old girl.

Bea and the Buttersquelch is the first book of Sam Hash, from Thornton Heath and: "It's a story about friendship, imagination, playing outside, and laughing. It is also about sleeping well, eating well and about not being scared of the dark".

Sam, who completed a Fine Art BA at Middlesex University has always loved reading and writing.

She had incorporated lettering and words into her artwork and tattoo designs doing a variety of jobs to pay the bills while continuing to practice her art.

Bea who meets the Buttersquelch called Boil in her garden and after sharing a sandwich in Bea's Grandad's shed, they get sucked down the back of an old armchair, which turns out to be a portal.

The illustrated book follows the pair as they arrive in Boils' world, populated by Inklebinks and Megabinksadn and their adventure begins.

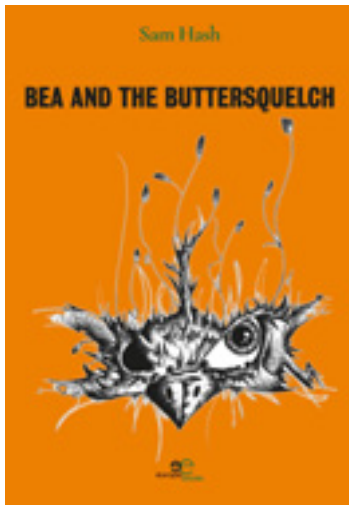
To celebrate publication of the book Sam had a design of the the Buttersquelch tattooed on her arm!

She said: "I got the idea from a doodle I did last summer and I called it a Buttersquelch, it looked a bit like a bird mixed with a squashed lump of butter, do thats what I called him."

"Later in the year for Xmas I got a set of spiky steampunk goggles for my goddaughter, who has a lot of red curly hair."

"A couple of days after I was lying in bed ready to fall asleep I had the idea for a line...., 'Bea stared at the Buttersquelch and the Buttersquelch stared straight back'... And I thought, Hang on a sec, that's an opening line to a story..."

"Then I just carried on writing. I had no plan, so even half way through I had no idea how it would end, I just knew that it made me laugh, and I mean really laugh a lot, so carried on."



Then I added a few more illustrations and sent it off.

"Now I'm here, with a book, talking to you! It's very exciting and I just want everyone that reads it to find it as funny as I do."

"It is a sweet story about friendship, bit being scared of things that are new, eating and sleeping a lot, and about having a good sense if energy."

The book is available to buy from Foyles and retails at £11.50. Contact Sam via Facebook @samHash2020

HELP THE 44TH CROYDON AIR SCOUTS REACH FOR THE SKY

A scout group which is celebrating its birthday with the redevelopment of its headquarters is appealing for volunteers to support young people continue to enjoy scouting for decades to come.

The history of the Thornton Heath based Croydon 44th Air Scout Group began when it leased the hut on Hythe Road from the Air Training Corp .

Part of the requirement was for there to be an Air Scout Group in residence so the 44th Croydon Scouts were born, almost by default.

In June the Croydon 44th Air Scout Group, formed from two groups merging, marks its 44th birthday while the Air Scouting movement established in 1941 celebrate its 80th anniversary this year.

The land the scout hut is situated on is being redeveloped which means the group will get a new building as part of the housing development.

For the next two years while this happens



At one point this fixed trainer glider was at the back of scout hut which was used by the then scouts for training purposes.

the scouts are relocating to temporary premises.

Since March with Covid-19 restrictions the group's activities have been limited to online with weekly Zoom meetings with presentations from: 'Space Dave' from a space centre in New Zealand, the London Air Ambulance team and survival techniques shared by members of the Royal Navy Marines.

Group Scout Leader Pat Stannard said: "We provide fun and adventure for young people aged from six years and upwards and outside of COVID restrictions they will again be taking part in normal scouting activities, weekly meetings, plus going on camps, enjoying a whole range of adventurous activities including, archery, climbing, undertaking new challenges, making new friends and best of all earning badges to wear on their uniform."

In the past the group have been involved

with different air activities with the older aged young people having flown in Cessna 4 seater airplanes out of Redhill, microlights in Kent and gliders in Hampshire.

They also had the privilege to support local air shows at Biggin Hill as well as visiting aviation sites including RAF Hendon, RAF Duxford, Tangmere, Newquay Aviation Museum and also toured the Air Sea Rescue helicopter while at an Air Camp in Cornwall. The Beavers who are the younger aged have visited Croydon Airport Museum.

Pat added: "Scouting is about getting involved and hopefully finding your happy place. All are welcome, no experience needed!"

To find out more about volunteering email: croydon44thairscouts@outlook.com

GRANGEWOOD ON THE GREEN LINE

A green version of the iconic London tube map which offers an alternative way to get around the city using green routes features a Thornton Heath park.

The Greenground Map created by Helen llus has 'green lines' which represent the connections between parks that could be walked and cycled.

Grangewood Park is just one of 400 iconic parks and open spaces across London to appear on the map.

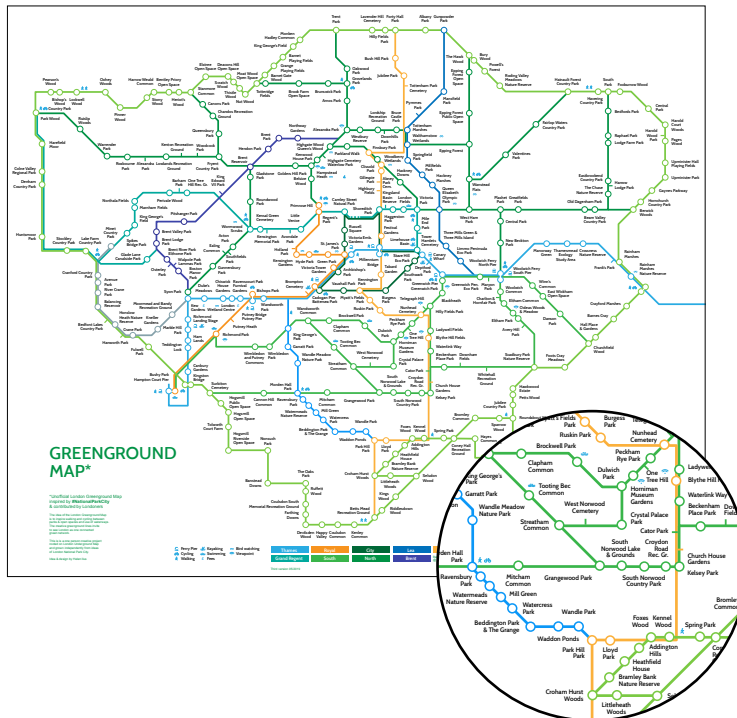
The nature-loving map has 12 lines outlining the city's waterways, including the River Thames and Grand Regent Canal, and local outdoor spaces nearby.

Greenground shows the

walking distances between parks, plus it plots ferry piers, kayaking and swimming spots as well as places for bird watching and viewpoints.

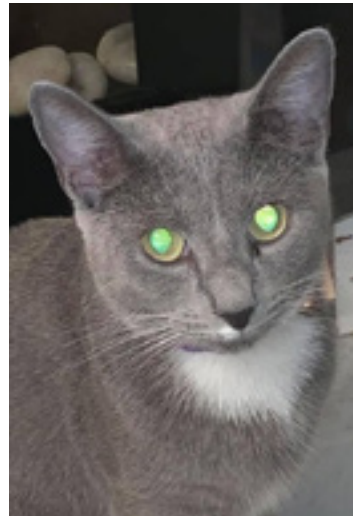
Helen, a graphic designer moved to London in 2010 and walked every day to work for two years.

According to London National Park City, the Greenground map is mainly "an experiment to represent London's green spaces as a accessible map for Londoners, inspiring to take alternative, green route for commute or leisure."



HELP DEVASTATED FAMILY FIND THEIR MISSING CAT COLA

A family have been left devastated by the disappearance of their missing cat Cola who vanished on Boxing Day.



Karina and Nigel Driscoll brought the cat two years ago after their 11-year-old daughter Melody died.

Mum Karina Marie explained that she had hoped that Cola would help her other children with their grief and help them heal.

But now Cola has gone missing the children believe that anything they love leaves them just like their sister did and are 'broken hearted'.

Cola went missing from the family home in Green Lane and Karina is urging people to check for the distinctive grey and white chested cat, which has white paws, in their sheds, garages and gardens.

Sadly since appealing for information they have also received a number of hoax calls.

Karina said: "One was someone pretending to be the RSPCA saying that they have her and she has an injured paw, but it wasn't real, and we also had someone call us saying they had seen a Chinese man chasing after Cola as she escaped from his Chinese restaurant."

"It has been so upsetting, so these people that make hoax calls not have a heart?"

Karina added: "Cola is such a shy timid cat outside so it's so hard to believe she would of gone into another house on her own accord. She's been missing for six weeks now. We had some

sighting down Norbury Avenue but the cat wasn't her, it was a boy, there was also a sighting in Crescent Way but we have looked there and not seen any cat fitting her description."

"The night she went missing my husband was putting the bins out at 10pm, and she ran out as he left the door open, she never normally went out that late and there has been no trace of her since."

Cola was wearing a purple sparkly collar with a name tag and heart charm on with her family details. She is spayed and chipped.

Please ring 07805 439091 if you have seen Cola or know her whereabouts.

AMANDA NOMINATED FOR TOP AWARD

A Thornton Heath veterinary receptionist has been nominated for a top national award in recognition of her hard work and dedication. Amanda Bailey from Mark Nelsons Veterinary Surgery on Woodville Road has been put forward for the Pet Plan awards as Receptionist of the Year.



Amanda is the friendly face of the practice and is always there to help and customers, human and furry, who ere full of praise for her kindness.

The Petplan Veterinary Awards recognise the hard work and dedication of veterinary staff across the UK and received 13,238 for nominations.

Mark Nelson customers were quick to congratulate Amanda.

Hannah Sharma said: "A well deserved nominee. Amanda is always so welcoming and kind, she is an absolute credit to the surgery."

Sara-jayne Richards said: "Congratulations Amanda you are always so Happy to see Gus when he comes xx"

Kim Smith said: "Well done Amanda you deserve it you are so kind and helpful and also put your self out to help everyone you are amazing keep up the good work well done!"

Collie Harp: "Very worthy Amanda is the loveliest woman and great with all our pets."



Here David Adair and Patrick Rodgers explain Why They Love Thornton Heath.

"We moved to Thornton Heath some 20 years ago from Brixton to get a house with a garden and at first thought it might be too suburban.

However, we soon settled in and now

WHY WE LOVE THORNTON HEATH

with 5 fruit trees we technically have an orchard, growing peaches, plums, cherries, apples and pears.

Our garden is such an oasis, in the summer, you could be in deepest Kent listening to the birds and the bees amongst the flora and fauna.

We even heard an owl a couple of weeks ago, yet walk outside the front door and you have the lively multi-cultural buzz of the Heath, Thornton Heath that is.

We have a dog from Battersea Dogs home and love walking him locally in Grangewood Park, The Rec and Mitcham

Common but also have Crystal Palace Park, Addington Hills and South Norwood Country Park close at hand.

We have made great friends through dog walking, including Iain and Simon who we spend many a happy New Years Eve with watching the many fireworks around the area.

One of us runs a Corporate Charitable Foundation and the other is in IT so it is important to be able to get into town easily if we need to.

We have been lucky enough to support local charities such as ASKI who run amazing

support programmes for the over 50's locally.

We love the annual festivals such as those from the Sakthly Ghanapathy temple and the Thornton Heath Festival which reminds us of Brixton in the 90's before it was gentrified.

We only hope Thornton Heath doesn't get too gentrified as the thing that makes it so special is the people with the range of cultures and ethnic diversity including the food.

The people are unpretentious and friendly, as the song says it is important 'to be real' and there is plenty of realness here!"

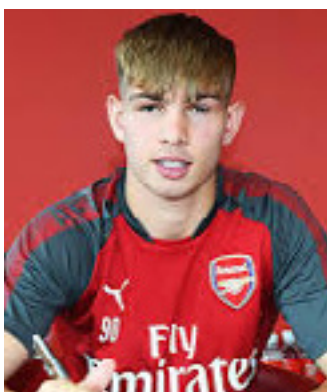
THORNTON HEATH'S CLAIM TO THE 'CROYDON DE BRUYNE'

They call him the 'Croydon De Bruyne' but Arsenal's rising star Emile Smith Rowe was actually born in Thornton Heath and is another one of our small town's success stories.

The talented youngster who has been compared to Manchester City's world class midfielder Keven De Bruyne, joins the growing list of luminaries to come out of The Ends who have gone on to excel in the world of sport. Smith Rowe, 20, who was courted by Tottenham, Chelsea and Barcelona in his academy days when just aged 15, has no problems with comparisons to great players and relishes learning from the very best in the game.

While in Thornton Heath he played on Sunday's for Beckenham based Junior Elite FC founded by the former professional footballer Colin Omogbehin whose other notable graduates include Manchester United Aaron Wan-Bissaka, who also hails from Croydon and started his career at Crystal Palace.

Omogbehin said of Smith Rowe who he recognised as having 'something special'. "He was never boastful. He was always humble. Always respectful. Credit must go to his mum and dad for that."



His Arsenal career started back in 2010 when he signed for the Gunners as a 10-year-old.

His parents Fiona and Les, who both work in education found it difficult to travel two hours daily to drop off Emile at Hale End where Arsenal's academy is, so they so decided to relocate. They try to get to every game their son plays in and it is them who instilled in him the importance of hard work and respect.

As a shy teenager Smith Rowe was asked where he was born, and to make the interviewer's life as straightforward as possible, he replied "Croydon", figuring this was more recognisable than going into the details of Thornton Heath.

In a Sky interview recently, he said: "I've met a lot of big headed people and I really don't want to be like that. My family have helped me to stay humble and keep my feet on the ground."

FOOTBALLER REFUSES TO BE A 'TICK BOX'

Premiership star Wilfried Zaha says it is "degrading" to have to take a knee before every game and is fed up of being used to "tick boxes" without change happening.

The Crystal Palace star, said he is tired of having to kneel in order to show black people matter as much as anyone else and hit out at firms who are keen to have him speak on the issue without enacting any meaningful change.

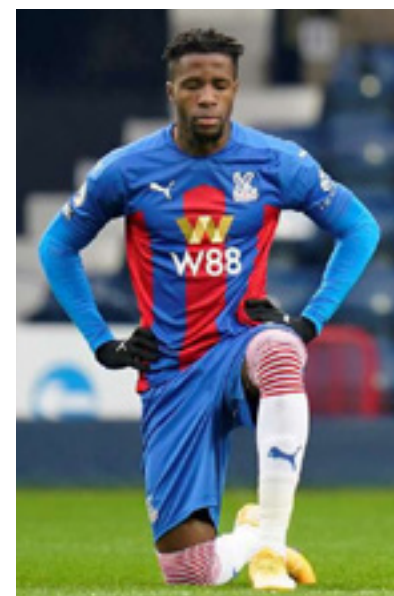
Zaha, who grew up in Thornton Heath has been the target of online racial abuse a number of times - including from a 12-year-old boy last year.

The 28-year-old speaking on The Judy podcast, said: "The whole kneeling down - why must I kneel down for you to show that we matter? Why must I even wear Black Lives Matter on the back of my top to show you that we matter? This is all degrading stuff.

"When people constantly want to get me to do Black Lives Matter talks and racial talks and I'm like, I'm not doing it just so you can put 'Zaha spoke for us'. Like a tick box, basically.

"I'm not doing any more, because unless things change, I'm not coming to chat to you just for the sake of it, like all the interviews I've done.

"All these platforms - you see what's happening, you see people making fake accounts to abuse black people constantly, but you don't change it."



FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

A fundraising virtual comedy night to support non league football club The Rams sold out raising £500.

The Thornton Heath club has had to look at alternative ways of generating revenue with all football having been suspended during this latest lockdown.

Grassroots sport has been badly affected with finances tight for many clubs like AFC Croydon Athletic, which hasn't had any income since their last home game at the Mayfield Stadium on October 31.

With no revenue coming in, the club has turned to fundraising events to ensure it can continue to host football in a safe environment, when circumstances allow, for the next generation of young people, their families and spectators.

The first fundraiser was a virtual comedy night featuring South London's finest comedians. The hour and a half comedy spectacular screened via Zoom was hosted by MC Siôn James with proceeds



from the 90 sold £8 ticket sales going to support the club.

The stellar line up included: Lloyd Griffith: star of Soccer AM on Sky Sports; comedian, impressionist and beatboxer Stefano Paolini; Winner of the 2019 Funny Women Award Laura Smyth who featured on ITV's Jonathan Ross Comedy Club and Thanyia Moore star of BBC3s show Bamous, BBC 2's Mock The Week and Channel 4's TV documentary Black British and Funny.

Seán Ryan, Commercial and Fundraising Manager, said: "We need to be innovative in generating funds over the coming months. Our virtual comedy night raised some critical funds for the club

"Like many clubs at our level, we hope to be successful in securing financial support through the Football Winter Survival Package. "

In November the government announced a £300 million injection of funding to support spectator sports impacted by coronavirus restrictions.

The club is also hoping to attract new sponsors and is eager to work with local businesses whose products and services can be promoted at the ground, on the club website or via social media.

Players training has also had to be suspended for a couple of months, in accordance with regulations.



DONNA'S PRIDE AT BECOMING AN OBE.

Olympic athlete Donna Fraser who grew up and started her career in Thornton Heath has been made an OBE for services to equality, inclusion and diversity in the workplace.

The former sprinter, who became UK Athletics' Equality, Diversity and Engagement Lead in 2017, was among those to have received recognition in the New Year Honours list.

The sprinter said: "I'm bursting with pride to be recognised in the Queens New Year's Honours List. Thank you all who have supported me on and off the track!"

The Olympic 400m finalist, who finished fourth in the 2000 Sydney Games and competed at three other Olympics, grew up in Thornton Heath and was a pupil at Winterbourne Junior Girls School, St Mary's Catholic High School and Croydon College. She raced for Croydon Harriers Athletics Club.

Donna has continued to support Thornton Heath working with local schools including the Gonville Academy.

PLAYER TO RUN EQUIVALENT OF JOHN O'GROATS TO LAND'S END

A rugby player is collectively running the distance from John O'Groats to Land's End, covering 874 miles, to raise money for the charity Mind.



Fortunately Streatham-Croydon Rugby Football Club's Adam Sheehy is joining with some friends who will share with him running the distance.

Adam has been public in his tackling of mental health issues by raising awareness of his own struggles and is raising money for a great charity, writes Millie Ross.

The latest lockdown imposed in early January, meant that players were unable to train together and the steps they

had taken down the RFU's "return to rugby" route reversed with all grassroots seasons have been cancelled.

Streatham-Croydon RFC however continue to look to and invest in the future and work continues apace at the Frant Road site, with clubhouse renovations, a new roof and brickwork restoration all beginning next week. Works to improve playing surfaces are ongoing and new posts will be installed on both pitches.

Paxton Academy have moved to their new site on London Road and the space will be

returned to gardens.

There are lots of plans in motion for events to mark the 150th anniversary of the Club, which will of course be dependent on current restrictions easing.

The club was also delighted to announce that on the February 6, SCRFC players Fran and Craig Metcalfe - senior players for the ladies and men's 1st XV's - became parents to Charlie Metcalfe with the hope that the next generation of players is well under way!

A link to donate to Adam's can be found on the SCRFC social media sites.