

**Leader of the Council on Executive priorities for 2020/21 for Policy and Performance Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Richard Watts**

Islington Council is committed to making our borough a fairer place, and tackle the deep inequalities which exist in the borough.

The Covid-19 crisis has shone a bright light on the deep inequalities and unfairness that we know blight our communities in Islington. The recent PHE report on the structural inequalities in Covid-19 impact – including the disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities, which highlight the injustices, racism and deep inequalities in our society.

Our immediate priority is to keep local residents safe as we continue to fight this virus for the foreseeable future. But as we start to recover, our mission to make the borough a fairer place has never been more important.

As Leader, I will be chair the Local Outbreak Control Board, which will bring together partners is NHS, CCG, Police, VCS and community leaders to ensure that we can continue to protect local people, and respond to any local outbreak and protect those most at risk and ensure democratic accountability I maintained.

As restrictions are lifted, or re-instated, many residents will still require financial and practical support – we are committed to continuing to help those residents who need it by protecting food distribution provision and maintain financial hardship payments for those who need it.

This crisis has confirmed what we already knew that Islington has a strong, resilient and diverse community. That energy, diversity and resilience is central to drive forward our pioneering Fairer Together programme by working with our thriving businesses, our passionate and committed voluntary and community sector, excellent public services to highlight our fundamental and continuing commitment to tackling inequality through early intervention and prevention, empowering everyone in Islington to start well, live well and age well. This is a key part of our recovery, ensuring that the likely upcoming recession leads to a better, fairer, more equal society, unlike the issues which have plagued this country since the recession of the 1980s.

As we move into the new phase and the easing of lockdown continues, it is vital that we do not try to return to the exact same society we had pre-Covid-19. We can only make our borough a fairer place by tackling the inequalities and unfairness the pandemic has highlighted and making sure we Build Back Better as a Council and as a borough.

Covid-19, as well as the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests, have highlighted the racial injustice that many in our borough face. A fairer Islington is one that is safer for black people, a borough that supports young black people and helps them prosper and a borough that listens to our BAME communities, hears their concerns and takes actions – we must take meaningful, quick action to tackle systemic racism in Islington.

We need to have an economic development strategy fit for an age where we will be living with Coronavirus for a while yet, and then an age where we are recovering from it. We can't assume that growth in Islington will continue to be driven by the buoyant Central London economy. The state must lead the recovery to initiate investment, give confidence and shape a fairer future.

Islington has embraced the Community Wealth Building agenda and this approach should define our economic strategy. Our work on this is in its formative stages but we need to make much better use of the Council's role as an economic player – using our procurement, assets and partnership to

provide economic opportunity to working people. We must continue to measure ourselves by the quality of life for ordinary residents, not by GDP or GVA.

We must rebuild our local economy in a way which both promotes jobs, skills and economic opportunity while taking us towards a zero carbon future. By doing this, we can work towards our ambitious goal of a net-zero carbon borough by 2030, as well as making Islington a fairer place for our residents. Our Vision 2030 Action Plan for achieving this goal is wide-ranging and single-minded. Our borough will be fairer if we make it healthier, greener and more sustainable.

A vital aspect of reducing toxic air pollution and improving air quality in Islington is our dynamic plans for People-Friendly Streets across the borough. Local people have told us that they have been enjoying their streets more during the current crisis, finding it easier and safer to walk, cycle or use wheelchairs and buggies, and creating a healthier environment to travel around in.

We know that nothing will ever be quite the same again after the Coronavirus crisis and that we must act now to make sure our streets are people-friendly.

A top priority in the year ahead is to massively accelerate our programme to roll out People-Friendly Streets across the borough. These will make it easier and safer to walk and cycle, with healthier and greener streets for all, and more space for social distancing.

Our existing priorities, for which we were elected in 2018, form a key part of the Coronavirus recovery. I am immensely proud of the Council's determination to get as many people sleeping rough off the streets and into safe, secure accommodation during the pandemic. But we can't let that stop once the crisis is over. We must continue to deliver the council homes, and genuinely affordable homes local people need.

Unfortunately, lockdown has meant children have been unable to attend school and we know that this is going to lead to a widening of the attainment gap between children from some of our borough's wealthier families and those that are least well-off. We have worked tirelessly over the last ten years to ensure every child has the best possible start in life and we can't let Coronavirus reverse that. But providing a world-class education isn't enough, there must be high-quality, well-paid jobs available when our young people leave school. Our Community Wealth Building programme seeks to ensure that once our young people leave school, they are able to go into rewarding jobs that support our borough's economy.

We also know that many in Islington worry about theirs and their family's safety. We can't have a fair borough without having a safe borough. We will continue progress the work outlined in this year's Budget into tackling domestic violence, and anti-social behaviour, as well as working closely with our local Police, other partners and neighbouring boroughs to prevent and tackle crime.

The priorities for the year ahead are made harder by Central Government's failure to properly fund councils to respond to the crisis, after ten years of austerity. Islington Council was told, at the start of this crisis to 'spend whatever it takes'. Unfortunately the Government has backed away from that promise and failed to supply the funding needed for our response to the virus. Our current projected gap in funding is approximately £25m. That is an unsustainable amount of money about ten years of cuts to local government funding.

Islington has been at the forefront of the campaign to call for the Government to fully-fund councils' response to this virus. This year we will continue to call on the Government to fulfil its promise, and provide adequate funding to Councils and other public services so that we can continue to deliver vital service to local people, as well as building a fairer Islington.