

Forward Plan Protocol

1. Purpose

This document sets out how the Council proposes to plan and publicise information about its forthcoming decisions by operating a 6-monthly Forward Plan. The Forward Plan is an enabler to increasing transparency and allowing greater participation in decision making (see section 3).

The statutory provisions set out in Part 4B of the Constitution (The Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules) take precedence over the content of this document and covers matters such as statutory key decision requirements and exempt items of business. In publishing and updating its Forward Plan and decision information under this protocol, the Council will continue to ensure it meet its statutory obligations, including giving 28 days' notice of key decisions and exempt matters.

2. Forward Plan definition

The Council has chosen to go beyond the statutory requirements to publish and give notice of key decisions. This protocol proposes criteria for publicising information about forthcoming decisions with further advanced notice to facilitate greater involvement and participation in decision making.

The Council's Forward Plan is designed to be a live document that lists high-level information about all important forthcoming decisions that can be practicably publicised at least 6 months in advance of the anticipated decision date, as well as those that are publicised with less than 6 months' notice where exceptions apply (see section 6). This includes all Cabinet and individual Cabinet Member executive decisions and officer key decisions as well as proposed significant non-executive Council decisions (see section 5).

Some decisions will be expected to be included with more than 6 months' notice, where this is practicable, for example revisions of major strategies and policies where the next review date is known several years in advance.

The Forward Plan will be updated and published monthly on the Council's website [HERE](#). It is a flexible document that provides headline information about the Council's anticipated forthcoming decisions and allows for updates to be made to previously published information nearer the decision date when more detailed / background information is available. As such the information available on this forward plan may alter as the matter progresses.

The existence of the Forward Plan as described in this document is an additional activity that does not interfere with the existing legal requirements relating to the publication of the notice of forthcoming key decisions and in no way impacts on the obligations and rights arising from such publication. This information will continue to be updated and published as part of the forward planning process and in line with the current rules set out in the Constitution, including statutory deadlines as prescribed in the Access to Information Procedure Rules (Part 4B of the Constitution), the requirements of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1972 and 2000, as variously amended.

3. Forward Plan objectives

The Council operates an inclusive Forward Plan to meet its main objectives aligned to the findings of the Governance Review [link], namely to:

- ensure that forthcoming decisions are identified and visible to both Members and residents at an early stage of the process;
- provide sufficient time for Members to decide which decisions warrant greater scrutiny, would benefit from cross-party debate or require greater involvement of residents;
- increase Members' capacity and ability to debate and influence important decisions before they are taken;
- enable effective working between the Cabinet, Cabinet Member Advisory Committees and Scrutiny to utilise the scope for early planning to avoid duplication and ensure important decisions always benefit from oversight of advisory bodies.

4. Audience

The key audience for this document is Members and Officers, and in particular the political and officer Leadership tasked with ensuring an up to date Forward Plan exists.

Scrutiny and Cabinet Member Advisory Committees (CMACs) together with Cabinet Members will use the Forward Plan to agree pre-decision activities and engage backbench Members in scrutinising and advising on forthcoming decisions.

Residents will have access to the published [Forward Plan](#) including information about any relevant committee meetings where the items will be debated and contact information for relevant service area leads, to ensure transparency and an opportunity to participate in decision making.

5. Forthcoming decisions to be included on the Forward Plan

For avoidance of doubt the following decisions are subject to this protocol and are to be included on the Forward Plan:

- a) All key decisions [in line with definition and guidance] to be taken by Cabinet collectively, Cabinet Members individually or Officers
- b) All significant non-key executive decisions to be made by Cabinet and Cabinet Members that may require input or cross-party debate, as defined in Part 4P of the Constitution
- c) Specific non-executive decisions relating to the Council's policy and budget framework, as listed below:
 - Budget. The Budget includes the allocation of financial resources to different services and projects, propose contingency funds, setting the Council Tax and decisions relating to the control of the Council's borrowing requirement,
 - Equality Strategy;
 - Health and Well Being Strategy;
 - Community Safety Strategy;
 - Children and Young Persons Plan;
 - Library Plan
 - Initial Local Implementation (Transport) Plan;

- Annual Council Budget
- The Admission Arrangements for Community Schools;
- The plans and strategies for planning, development and conservation in the Borough comprising the Croydon Plan and other approved and adopted development plan documents and supplementary planning documents which make up the Local Development Framework for Croydon;
- Plans, Policies and Strategies which together make up the Housing Strategy;
- Youth Justice Plan.
- The Making or revising of a Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Exercise of the power to determine further discounts for certain dwellings and set higher amount of council tax in respect of long term empty dwellings under sections 11A and 11B of the LGFA 1992, as amended

With the exception of decisions listed in c), all other decisions relating to non-executive business, for example Planning or Licensing Committee decisions, pensions etc, are not subject to this protocol and will follow the necessary statutory procedures.

For avoidance of doubt a) and b) includes any forthcoming executive decisions relating to approval of existing or new strategies, policies and strategic plans that are reviewed on a periodic basis, including :

- Air Quality Action Plan
- Autism Strategy
- Communications Plan or Strategy
- Community Safety Strategy
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategies)
- Corporate Plan
- Croydon Carers Strategy / Plan
- Croydon Cycling Strategy / Plan
- Croydon Growth Zone Delivery Plan
- Croydon's Sports and Physical Activity Strategy
- Culture Plan
- Digital Strategy
- Early Years Plan
- Homelessness Strategy
- Housing Asset Management Plan
- Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
- Local Implementation Plan (LIP)
- SEND Strategy
- Skills and Employment Action Plan
- South London Waste Plan (Joint with Sutton)
- VCS Strategy

6. Publication of items with less than six-month notice

The key principle for operating an inclusive Forward Plan is to proactively publicise the available information about forthcoming decisions and endeavour to share that information at the earliest opportunity on all decisions that can be foreseen/forecast and publicised.

It is recognised however that flexibility needs to be applied within the operation of the Forward Plan to ensure that certain types of decisions can be published with less notice where they could not reasonably be shared 6 months in advance.

This should however only apply to a limited number of time-sensitive decisions. For example it is recognised that Cabinet Member decisions relating to urgent procurement might not be practicably foreseeable 6 months in advance. As such those decisions will be added to the Plan with shorter notice and as soon as deemed feasible.

Measures for ensuring that the late publication of items is managed appropriately (by exception) and not misused, include:

- That upon publication of those key as well as non-key decision notices on the Forward Plan, the reason for exclusion from the six-monthly forward planning cycle will be clearly stated
- That Democratic Services will produce a key performance indicator (KPI) relating to the percentage of items published with less than 6 months' notice (broken down by reason, decision type and department)
- That biannually the Cabinet Members, CMAC and Scrutiny collaboratively review and consider if the reasons for previously published late items were appropriate, and agree what improvements need to be made as necessary.

This is to ensure the Council upholds the standard for publicising information at earliest possibility.

This process does not negate or interfere with the statutory Scrutiny role in holding the Executive to account and the Scrutiny powers to be consulted on exceptions relating to key decisions and notice periods as set out in Part 4B of the Constitution. Scrutiny remains the body to be consulted on late notice publications for key decisions, and has a statutory and constitutionally defined role in overseeing and ensuring reason and consistency is applied when utilising the exception rules.

7. Details to be included on the Forward Plan

The following information will be published as a minimum for each forthcoming item when first placed on the Forward Plan:

- i. Title of the item (informative title, can be amended at later date)
- ii. Decision description(short description and reason if not added 6 months in advance)
- iii. Whether the decision is key, non-key or non-executive
- iv. Decision due date (as a minimum anticipated month and year of decision)
- v. Lead Member
- vi. Lead Officer
- vii. Decision Makers
- viii. Department
- ix. Contact details (Officer)

The above information may be updated as required (e.g. decision due date might change) and the below information may be published alongside i-ix if known or can be added for each item previously published on the Forward Plan when and if applicable. This is to ensure that all relevant information can be found in a single place and a clear history of the item's progress from first publication to Decision approval exists.

- Reason for key (if key)
- Estimated financial implications (if any)
- Wards affected
- Decision made at meeting (Committee name and date if applicable)
- Bodies to be consulted and dates (e.g. CMAC, Scrutiny, GPAC)
- Open/exempt/part exempt
- Associated Documents

The Forward Plan links to the [Decisions tab](#) that details the date that the decision was taken and provides a searchable audit trail of all previously made decisions.

8. Management of the Forward Plan process

Directors will be responsible for submitting new items for the Forward Plan and Cabinet Members will be responsible for sign off prior to publication.

The summary of Forward Plan information will be considered monthly by Cabinet Members collectively and at meetings of Executive/Corporate Leadership team.

The Council's leadership team will be accountable for ensuring the accuracy of Forward Plan content prior to monthly republication and smaller updates will be made to the Plan on a rolling basis.

The Council's webpage publicising the Forward Plan will be kept up to date by Democratic Services, who will make any necessary updates and produce summary reports for Leadership meetings.

For avoidance of doubt this process does not interfere with the Constitutional rules around managing urgent key decisions or exempt items. Any information will be published in line with the existing procedures and requirements stated in the Council's Constitution, as such some items might be published as urgent and some documents might be exempt from publication. This will be clearly stated.

9. Resident access to information

The Forward Plan can be accessed [HERE](#) including guidance that explains its purpose and the ways in which residents can engage with decision making.

The Council aims to display its Forward Plan and previous decisions made in a way that is easily searchable, that links to associated documents and showcases each decisions' journey through the various committees including Scrutiny and CMAC (where relevant).

10. Review of this protocol

It is recognised that this protocol describes a significant departure from the Council's previous ways of working and a period of adjustment is necessary to allow the Executive and officers to adapt to the requirements set out in this document. As such it is accepted that there will be a transitional period and the ability to include all decisions subject to this protocol will increase over time.

As a prerequisite it is expected that from the outset of this protocol being approved, all key decisions and decision making reports going to Cabinet will be published and all decisions relating to the review of strategies and policies are also added to the Plan as those can be easily predicated in terms of their next review point.

The Council will measure and report on the application and effectiveness of this protocol 6 months from the date of approval. This protocol will be reviewed and amended when and if deemed necessary by the Council.