



## **Executive Mayor's Update to Scrutiny and Overview Committee**

**May 2023**

Since my election as Croydon's first Executive Mayor in May 2022, my Administration and I have worked to make progress on the key issues residents elected me to deliver.

This update sets out a high-level summary of the key areas of progress made during my first year as Croydon's Executive Mayor.

At the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's request this update covers three key themes:

- A summary of my Administration's key achievements over our first year in office.
- My Administration's priorities for the year ahead.
- The Council's relationship with the Improvement and Assurance Panel.

### **Key achievements**

Early on in my Administration I developed the Mayor's Business Plan (Appendix 1) reflecting my manifesto commitments which provide a guiding corporate strategy document for the Council.

The Business Plan sets out my five core Outcomes for the Council. These are:

- The Council balances its books, listens to residents and delivers good sustainable services.
- Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning.
- Children and young people in Croydon have the chance to thrive, learn and fulfil their potential.
- Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we're proud to call home.
- People can lead healthier and independent lives for longer.

Priority actions were developed to support the delivery of each of the Outcomes as set out in the Business Plan.

Over my first year in office the Council has made significant progress delivering the Mayor's Business Plan, a summary of the key achievements is set out below against each of the Business Plan Outcomes.

### **Outcome One: The council balances its books, listens to residents and delivers good sustainable services.**

- Completed a forensic review of the Council's finances through the Opening the Books review uncovering £161m of historic financial failures and £49m of unresolved ongoing accounting issues.
- Forecasting a balanced outturn position for 2022/23 having delivered over £41m in savings compared with 2021/22.
- Set a balanced Budget for 2023/24.

- Secured £224m in additional Capitalisation Direction.
- Begun discussions with Government about a long-term solution to Croydon's toxic level of £1.6bn debt.
- Introduced new procurement processes to improve governance and efficiency.
- Developed a new Asset sales programme to deliver at least £50m in 23/24
- Introduced Mayor's Question time events and attended regular community events and Q&As to increase visibility and accountability of the Mayoralty.
- Successful roll out of new telephony system.
- Scrutiny chaired by Opposition.
- Successfully introduction of the new Executive Mayoral Governance model.

### **Outcome two: Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning.**

- Begun process of delivering a new swimming pool and leisure facilities in Purley.
- Secured £2.5m from the Shared Prosperity Fund to transform our district centres.
- Distributed over £17m in Government energy rebates through Council Tax to residents.
- The Council continues to be a Living Wage employer and encourages contractors to pay London Living Wage.
- Over £10m of funding for culture in the borough has been raised, including six key Croydon culture organisations being successful in securing National Portfolio Organisation Status. This represents a significant increase in funding for culture and arts in Croydon from the Arts Council, National Lottery Heritage fund and other key funding organisations.
- Launched a successful London Borough of Culture:
  - Over 1,000 attendees at the launch event, Oratorio of Hope
  - Secured positive press coverage nationally and regionally, including BBC News, ITV, The Times, Evening Standard – projecting Croydon's reputation for creative and cultural excellence.
  - Over 40 funded events planned for the year, ranging from dance to theatre to music and visual arts and events for all age ranges.
  - Building a legacy of growth and investment in Croydon to last beyond the London Borough of Culture.
  - Funded the programme from external funding and ringfenced grants, without drawing on any council General Fund.

### **Outcome three: Children and young people in Croydon have the chance to thrive, learn and fulfil their potential.**

- Invested £1.8m in youth provision over school holidays after securing Government HAF funding.
- Negotiated £27m Safety Valve funding from the DFE to support plans for more children with SEND to attend Croydon schools.
- Secured £5m development funding for the Family Hub and Start for Life programme focused on early intervention and holistic care to join-up services centred on families' needs.
- Preparing for upcoming Ofsted and other inspections.
- Brought four children's centres back in house after the previous administration failed to attract willing providers.
- Secured £329k from DFE to refurbish a council-owned property and establish a small 4-bed children's home to stabilise and assess young people with complex needs.
- Invested £200,000 in youth projects in response to safety concerns.
- Developing a new Youth Safety Delivery Plan to make Croydon safer for young people on our streets.

**Outcome four: Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we're proud to call home.**

### **Streets and Environment**

- Introduced new graffiti removal team.
- Reinstated grass cutting to effective levels.
- Met with Veolia at a senior level to secure service improvements.
- Secured Forestry Commission and GLA funding to plant almost 500 new trees.
- Begun the process of procuring a new waste contract.
- Invested in improvements to Whitehorse Rec using £85k of Levelling Up Parks funding.

### **Community Safety**

- Reintroduced the lapsed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for Croydon Town Centre.
- Begun the process to introduce a new PSPO in Thornton Heath.
- Held community safety walkabouts with police to identify and act on crime and ASB issues.
- Reviewed and strengthened the Community Safety Partnership, and worked with residents and community groups to improve how we listen and work with our communities to make Croydon safer-
- Convened a community engagement summit on tackling Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and agreed a statement of intent committing us to produce the borough's first VAWG delivery plan.

### **Housing**

- Adopted the Residents Charter designed by local tenants.
- Agreed and delivering a new Housing Transformation Plan
- Making significant progress improving conditions at Regina Road:
  - Programme to address current issues.
  - Regeneration consultation completed.
  - Successful ballot with 88% of those voting in favour of our regeneration proposal.
- Agreed and mobilising a new Housing Repairs Contract including insourcing the call centre function.
- Built a strong and collaborative relationship with the independent Housing Improvement Board
- HRA Business Plan updated and improvement plan established.
- Developing a new Homelessness Strategy.

### **Planning and Town Centre Regeneration**

- Revoked the SPD2 Design Guide.
- Reviewing the Local Plan to ensure developments respect local character.
- Reduced Planning applications backlog by 50% and introduced a Planning service transformation programme.
- Established a Mayoral Town Centre Advisory Board with key partners.
- Served Notice on CLP to secure £4m of improvements to North End and associated asset management initiatives to the Whitgift Centre.
- In senior-level discussions with Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield to bring forward a new masterplan for the town centre.
- Submitted Levelling Up Fund bid for Town Centre improvements and will continue to champion these.

**Outcome five: People can lead healthier and independent lives for longer**

- Held first Mental Health Summit in conjunction with Croydon Citizens.
- Worked with partners to secure Dementia Friendly status for Croydon.
- Building closer relationships between the Council and NHS through the co-chaired joint Health and Care Board.
- Secured 'Good' CQC ratings for all six of Croydon Council's Extra Care services.
- Became one of six nationwide Front Runner sites piloting best practice in NHS Discharge.
- Led the borough's tributes to her late Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II.
- Worked with VCFS to mitigate impact of the natural end of the Community Fund and to reset the relationship with the VCFS from funder to facilitator.
- Commissioned a new volunteering service from CVA.
- Co-designing a new Information and Advice Contract with the VCS.

In addition to the priorities identified in the Mayor's Business Plan, significant focus has been placed on ensuring that those responsible for Croydon's financial collapse are held to account.

At the Appointments and Disciplinary Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 there was unanimous cross-party agreement on recommendations to:

- Refer the Penn report, the two Reports in the Public Interest (RIPI), the Non-Statutory Rapid Review report, the PwC report into the Council's Companies and other liabilities, the Kroll report and all other relevant documents to the Metropolitan Police.
- Refer the above investigation reports to the former Members and Senior Officers' professional bodies and institutes for their consideration.
- Pursue legal action to reclaim as much of the former Chief Executive's settlement payment as possible.
- Write to the Secretary of State and others to call for a strengthening of the Local Government accountability framework to ensure that Senior Officer or Members can be held accountable for their actions in situations like Croydon's.

Whilst not core work of the Council, it is important to local residents and to me that those responsible for the financial and governance failures detailed in the two RIPI, Penn and Kroll reports are held to account for their actions.

## Priorities for 2023/24

**2.1** Over the coming year the Council will build upon the progress set out above to continue to deliver the Mayor's Business Plan and transform the Council.

**2.2** We will continue to deliver our various existing transformation programmes including the corporate Transformation plan, Housing Transformation Plan, People Strategy and those in CYPE and Adults focused on:

- Preparing for inspections from Ofsted, ILACS, HMIP, HMIC, CQC.
- Delivering the agreed Safety Valve Plan and SEND strategy 2023 – 2026
- Improving outcomes for care experienced young people
- Delivering the Adults Improvement Plan including managing demand through reablement, front door, hospital discharge and transitions.
- Working with the NHS to deliver the Front Runner project piloting best practice in NHS Discharge

**2.3** We will also continue to celebrate Croydon's year as London Borough of Culture, celebrating our cultural, heritage and creative sectors and maximising the long-term benefits for Croydon.

**2.4** Within the framework of the Mayor's Business plan I have also set several areas for particular focus during the coming year:

- **Finances** - Balancing the Council's budget and negotiating a package of support from Government to return Croydon to financial sustainability.
- **Housing** - Improving the Council's housing service and mobilising the new Housing Repairs Contract.
- **Town Centre** - Working with partners to develop a new masterplan to regenerate the Town Centre and increasing meantime use of empty units.
- **Addressing Broken windows issues** – Improving the performance of graffiti removal, grass cutting and related public realm services including the development of a robust new waste contract.
- **Purley Pool** – Progress the delivery of a new swimming pool and leisure facilities in Purley.
- **Planning** – Reform Planning policy through the Local Plan review to ensure development respects the character of our local communities.

## Relationship with the Improvement and Assurance Panel

Since becoming Mayor, my Cabinet, the Corporate Management Team and I have worked closely with the Improvement and Assurance Panel (IAP) developing open, collaborative and constructive working relationships.

During that time the IAP have not issued any 'advice notes' to the Administration, this compares with the six 'advice notes' issued to the previous Administration.

This positive working relationship was noted by the Written Ministerial Statement on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March which recognised *"the positive steps taken by the Council, with oversight from the Improvement and Assurance Panel, to lay the foundations for its recovery and ensure that legacy issues are being addressed. In May 2022, Croydon changed its model of governance with the election of a Mayor, Jason Perry, and a new Council. The Secretary of State acknowledges the Panel's assessment in their latest report that the Mayor has been working constructively with them and is prepared to "take firm decisions" to return the Council to a sustainable financial footing. The Panel have also commented that within the Council there is "much evidence of managers and staff grasping the scale of the problem and doing their best to fix it."*

Given the scale of the additional Capitalisation required it is understandable that, as a precautionary measure, the Government intends to formalise our current improvement panel arrangements by putting them on a statutory footing.

This step would give the panel the power to issue Directions to the Council where they consider we may otherwise breach our Best Value duty. We should be clear that this is not powers being taken away from the Council, it is granting the IAP the power to intervene in exceptional circumstances which we hope they will not need to use.

In light of the Government's 'minded to' decision to move the IAP to a statutory footing, Cabinet, CMT and I are working collectively with the IAP to support them to develop their Exit Strategy which will set out the key milestones and performance indicators against which progress on the Council's continuing transformation should be measured.

The IAP have identified three key areas of focus for their work as Finances, Transformation and Housing.

Executive decision-making power continues to rest with me as Executive Mayor. However, I have asked that the IAP are briefed on the development of major policies and strategies to ensure they are kept informed of progress and are able to offer expert advice as they have over the previous year.

In addition to the Chief Executive's formal response to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 'minded to' letter, I have written directly as Mayor to the minister committing that the Council *"will continue to work closely and collaboratively with the Panel and your Department to ensure Croydon benefits from all the support possible to put right the problems left by the previous Labour Administration."*

A full copy of my letter is available at Appendix 2.

The final confirmation of the Directions and the updated membership of the IAP are expected in due course.