

Priorities & new Ways for renewing Croydon

About this plan: why are we doing this now

Croydon faces the most serious financial challenges and is seeking a loan from the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This is caused by the issues highlighted in our auditor's Report in the Public Interest and exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic and to a lesser extent the uncertainty caused by leaving the European union, currently without a trade agreement.

These problems have deep roots, and while a decade of austerity, historic underfunding and the Covid-19 crisis have had a major impact on our finances they do not excuse where the council has made mistakes.

We will need to rebuild the council and rebuild trust with our communities and partners. We know this won't be easy and will require difficult decisions to be made. The challenges we face mean we have had to rethink the plans we set at the last local elections. We have had to work quickly to identify what is most important for our communities, in the immediate future and over the next three years.

This framework will give us a structure to help us identify: where our limited resources as a local authority can have the most positive impact for our residents; where we can leverage our partnerships to support our plans, and; where we should be using our democratic leadership to campaign and lobby government for change.

This framework will help council officers set a new corporate plan for the organisation. We will be able to assess spending and policy proposals in every area, from housing, to health, from economy to early help, from culture to community safety, or any other part of the council, any work or service will need to make a positive impact in addressing one of our three priorities. We have also set out how we will do this, so residents, partners, staff and service users know what they can expect from us and hold us to account for how we deliver, not just what we deliver.

Who we are: our values, our ambition

We are a borough that cares, about each other, and about the communities we live in. We have strong neighbourhoods, thriving local businesses and a vibrant voluntary sector. We want Croydon to be a place where no one is left behind. This means we will focus our efforts on the most vulnerable and most excluded residents, including those living in extreme poverty.

As a council we are explicit that we can't do this alone. The council has over many years nurtured really strong partnerships: with the NHS, with the wider public sector, with employers and businesses in the borough with the voluntary sector and above all with the people who live here. We will seek to work with every resident and organisation that wants to work with us to face our challenges and build a better future for Croydon. We know that we will need to work to earn back the trust we need for these partnerships to be effective.

Above all we want to build a compassionate, resilient and caring Croydon.

Our priorities – 2021-2024

The challenges we face are immense. While this doesn't stop us being ambitious for Croydon in the future, it does mean we will need to be clear about our priorities and make some tough decisions about what we will and won't do over the next few years.

For the next year to 18 months at least, Covid is going to be absolutely central to our day to day experiences, as a community and a country. The pandemic will continue to have a huge impact on what we are able to do and how we are able to operate as a local authority. Covid has also meant changes to how we deliver some services, introducing digital options which are more convenient for residents and more efficient for the council. The three priorities below should be viewed through that lens. Since March we have been regularly reviewing and updating our response to Covid to support our communities and will continue to do so as we simultaneously improve as a council.

Taking our significant challenges, together with our ambition for our borough and the assets we have, in the council, our communities and through our partners we have decided to focus on the following priorities for our borough:

- We will live within our means, balance the books and provide value for money for our residents.
- We will focus on tackling ingrained inequality and poverty in the borough. We will follow the evidence to tackle the underlying causes of inequality and hardship, like structural racism, environmental injustice and economic injustice.
- We will focus on providing the best quality core service we can afford. First and foremost, providing social care services that keep our most vulnerable residents safe and healthy. And to keep our streets clean and safe. To ensure we get full benefit from every pound we spend, other services in these areas will only be provided where they can be shown to have a direct benefit in keeping people safe and reducing demand.

This will mean some tough decisions for the council. We will stop delivering some services that we know our communities find valuable. But we believe that by focussing on a smaller number of priorities for our residents we will be more impactful on those issues, and ultimately deliver what we do keep doing to higher standard. We will be working with our residents, our staff and our partners to identify the right way to deliver our priorities for the next three years, and welcome everyone's views.

How we will do it – 2021-2024

The need for us to rebuild trust and in order to meet the scale of the challenges we face, means we will also need to change the way we work. This change won't be easy, and while some changes can be made quickly others will take time.

Throughout this we will focus on some key ways of working in the council, with our communities and partners to build a better Croydon.

- We will practise sound financial management, being honest about what we've spent and what we can afford.
- We will focus on what we, uniquely, can do as the local authority as the democratically elected leaders of our borough. This means we will focus on our core services, and a small number of evidence-based outcomes that deliver our priorities. But we will also continue to use our democratic mandate to convene our partners around a common purpose and to make a clear case for a better deal for Croydon.
- We will aim to become a much more transparent, open and honest council. We will involve residents in our decision making. But we will also need to be clear with residents about what we can do, and what we can't. When we have to say no, we will do so with compassion and take the time to explain our decisions.

The context for Croydon

Croydon, along with the rest of the UK, is about to enter one of the most challenging periods of its history. We don't yet know the full extent of Covid's impact – significant economic and social restrictions to protect us from the disease remain in place, themselves both causing social and economic problems now and storing up more for the future. In a matter of weeks we leave the European Union. A trade deal is currently uncertain.

Leaving the EU and Covid are exposing ingrained inequality, disadvantage and poverty, already present in our borough. It's likely that the people and groups who are already worse off will be hardest hit by these twin storms. We have particularly seen the racial and economic inequality in our borough laid bare.

These challenges will require us all to pull together to support each other and play our part to get us through the tough times to come.

Covid and leaving the EU are beyond the council's control, but it is against this backdrop, Croydon Council itself faces a financial challenge the scale of which has not been seen in local government. We have been subject to stinging external criticism – which although it hurts, we accept. We know if we are to put things right every area of our work will be impacted as we seek to reshape the council and put it on a stable financial footing, in order to weather the storms to come.

It's clear that Croydon faces crises on a number of fronts. It would be easier to give up and let someone else try to solve our triple challenges. But giving up is not in our nature. We are determined to use our democratic mandate, our convening power and influence and our resources efficiently and effectively to support residents through the tough times to come.

We remain hopeful and ambitious for our borough, and know, that while the immediate future looks uncertain, Croydon has a bright future.