

# LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

<b>REPORT:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>	
<b>DATE OF DECISION</b>	<b>22nd February 2023</b>	
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>Local Planning Authority Service Transformation</b>	
<b>CORPORATE DIRECTOR / DIRECTOR:</b>	<b>Nick Hibberd, Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration &amp; Economic Recovery</b>  <b>Heather Cheesbrough, Director of Planning &amp; Sustainable Regeneration (and chief planning officer)</b>	
<b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>	<b>Nick Hibberd, Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration &amp; Economic Recovery</b>	
<b>LEAD MEMBER:</b>	<b>Councillor Jeet Bains</b>	
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	No	
<b>CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?</b>  <i>(* See guidance)</i>	<b>NO</b>	
<b>WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>N/A</b>	

## 1 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1** The Local Planning Authority function (LPA) requires a significant transformation programme following a period of sustained budget reductions over recent years. Since the May 2022 election, the Executive’s Mayor has made improving the planning service a priority. An independent Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review has identified the need to transform the planning service. This report outlines how the service will respond to the recommendations made by the PAS review through establishing and delivering a Planning Transformation Programme. The programme will also deliver the priorities within the Executive Mayor’s Business Plan, enable the service to adjust to proposed national planning reforms, and respond to feedback from residents and applicants.
- 1.2** This report sets out the draft transformation programme for the LPA with the aim of delivering sustained improvement to performance and customer experience, whilst

responding to feedback from residents and applicants and delivering the future spatial development needs of the borough.

- 1.3 The Planning Advisory Service (PAS) were invited to undertake a Development Management Process Review and a Peer Challenge. From the recommendations made and engagement with PAS a Draft Transformation Action Plan for the Development Management workstream has been prepared.
- 1.4 This Draft Transformational Programme and Action Plan will be finalised following engagement with the wider officer group, the development community and Residents Associations.

## **2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

For the reasons set out in the report and its appendices, the Executive Mayor in Cabinet, is recommended:

- 2.1 To agree the draft Planning Transformation Programme structure, including the programme's high level workstreams, future governance and next steps.
- 2.2 To delegate the preparation of the Final Planning Transformation Programme, to the Corporate Director of Sustainable Communities, Regeneration and Economic Recovery following further consultation with the Cabinet Member of Planning and Regeneration.

## **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 Over recent years the entire Planning service has been stripped of funding with successive cuts and savings required. This has seen the Local Plan Review paused with Policy officers redirected to the Development Management service in an effort to address the resourcing crisis within this team following the reduction in permanent and agency staff in the run up to the issuing of the s114 Notice. Within this context the LPA has struggled to deliver excellent customer service due to the long-term under investment in staffing and lack of strategic investment in its physical assets of IT. This has hindered case officer productivity and led to inefficient processes and generated an increasing backlog of applications. This has taken valuable officer time away from 'softer' activities such as communications with applicants and building relationships within local communities to help enhance understanding of the planning process.. The provision of important 'added value' to applicants through its pre app service has also been undermined through delays in response times and even the capability to provide basic customer service, has at times been challenging. The pandemic further eroded the service's resilience with the submission of significantly increased levels of householder applications, which tipped the growing backlog into an unmanageable level.
- 3.2 In recognition of these challenges, the Planning Advisory Service, as an independent body were asked to review the DM service and provide recommendations to assist in its transformation. These recommendations and the process of the review have helped to inform a draft Planning Transformation Action Plan. A Planning Transformation Board has been set up to provide Governance and a new post of Planning

Improvement Manager is being recruited to provide the necessary resource to drive forward transformation for the DM team, review the local plan, and improve the planning enforcement service.

- 3.3** The Government is seeking to drive reform in the planning system through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, this includes much greater digital enablement of planning processes. Croydon is one of the top 50 busiest Local Planning Authorities in the country, and is seventh busiest in London receiving over 1700 Government monitored applications p/a, although this rises to c.5000 applications if all applications are counted and c.250 pre apps p/a. However, the current IT capability in the Planning Directorate is hampering its ability to engage in the Government's agenda and improvements are urgently needed in order that the DM service can meet the entry level of planning digitalisation that will be required once the Bill is enacted. Making these basic improvements would then allow participation in pilot improvement projects and increase chances to successfully bid for funds.

## **4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS**

- 4.1** Planning carries great responsibility – setting the spatial strategy and decisions about development will impact on generations to come as well as being a key determinant in progressing equality of opportunity for all. Preparing and delivering the spatial development of the borough is complex with a need to engage widely and for the LPA to make difficult decisions. Planning is a system which seeks to balance the rights of the individual to develop their own land against the impacts (social, economic and environmental) it will have on wider society. Balancing these often-competing perspectives to deliver sustainable development and good growth is at the heart of what the LPA does. In recognition of the challenge to do this and to listen and work more with local communities, the Executive Mayor's Business Plan has prioritised the need to transform and improve how the LPA delivers in the borough.

### Listening to Residents

- 4.2** Over recent years there has been clear feedback from residents and customers that Croydon's planning service needs to be transformed to become more responsive to resident's and applicant's concerns. Executive Mayor Perry made a clear manifesto pledge in the 2022 pre-election period to revoke the Croydon suburban design guide supplementary planning document (SPD2). The Executive Mayor's pledge, which has subsequently led to the revocation of SPD2 reflects a commitment to ensure that new development respects character, is led by design over density and improves the quality of future development. It is proposed that the Planning Transformation Programme will include a work stream on resident engagement and customer service as part of developing a more responsive and engaged planning service.

### Delivering the Executive Mayor's Business Plan

- 4.3** The Executive Mayor's Business Plan 2022-2026 identifies the following priorities that support the need for the Planning Transformation Programme. The Transformation Programme will seek to create an LPA that responds to the following Mayor's Business Plan outcomes and priorities:

## Outcome 2: Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning and learning

### 1. Priority: Support the regeneration of Croydon's town and district centres, seeking inward investment and grants

The Council will work with businesses and residents to develop a new, sustainable plan to regenerate Croydon town centre that responds to changes in the retail and leisure industry. Together we will develop collaborative strategies, seek inward investment and apply for grants to revive our high streets and district hubs, and unleash Croydon's economic potential.

With our partners we will:

- Develop and deliver a clear shared vision with businesses, developers and residents to steer our town centre and high street recovery.
- Launch an exciting inward investment campaign for Croydon to attract new businesses and jobs in growth sectors.

## Outcome 4: Croydon is a cleaner, safer and healthier place, a borough we're proud to call home

### 4. Priority: Ensure new homes are safe, well-designed and in keeping with the local area

New development will be design-led, not density-led. While we must continue to plan for new homes, schemes must respect the views of local people, enhance the character of our places, and recognise the need for amenity space.

We will:

- Review Croydon's Local Plan to remove intensification zones, support sustainable development and emphasise design and character over density.
- Revoke the SPD2 Suburban Design Guide.
- Review conservation areas to ensure the borough's special places are protected for generations to come.
- Review the planning and enforcement service to identify the resources needed to improve the service for customers.
- Enforce policies to tackle the cumulative impact of houses in multiple occupation.

#### Responding to reforms to national planning policy

- 4.4 The Planning Transformation Programme also needs to ensure that the LPA is able to respond to proposed changes happening nationally through the Levelling Up and

Regeneration Bill and the current consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Specifically, the Planning Transformation programme will ensure that the planning service is fit for purpose to respond the emerging national reform of planning policy:

- 4.5** The government in its introduction to its current consultation on the NPPF states; 'The government is committed to levelling up across the country, building more homes to increase home ownership, empowering communities to make better places, restoring local pride and regenerating towns and cities. The February 2022 Levelling Up White Paper reiterated the government's commitment to making improvements to the planning system to achieve this, by giving communities a stronger say over where homes are built and what they look like. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (the Bill) which is before Parliament will put the foundations in place for delivering this by creating a genuinely plan-led system with a stronger voice for communities. It will ensure greater provision of community infrastructure by developers, mandate that beautiful new development meets clear design standards that reflect community views, and enhance protections for our precious environmental and heritage assets.'
- 4.6** The December 2022 consultation on reforms to the NPPF, includes further clarification on how housing targets are derived, delivered and monitored, it seeks to give greater flexibility to responding to local circumstances and the promotion of character over density. However, in London, local plans will still need to accommodate housing targets that are set by the London Mayor in the London Plan. The importance of Local Authorities having an up-to-date Local Plan is emphasised and the concept of National Development Management policies are introduced and how these will be implemented.

#### Responding to Corporate Reviews

- 4.7** A number of Governance Reviews have been undertaken since the Council's first s114 notice and as part of its Improvement journey. The Independent Governance Review identified two recommendations in relation to Planning, one to promote more cross party working on planning policy and discussion and one to consider the recommendations in the PAS report and ensure those form part of the Planning Committee's journey to improve resident experience. These have informed the preparation of the Planning Transformation Action Plan.

## **5 Diagnostic of the current service and findings**

- 5.1** Since the arrival of the permanent Corporate Director in April 2022, much time has been spent reviewing the immediate work that can be actioned and longer-term actions which will form a larger programme of transformation of the LPA. This review has largely taken place through the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) peer challenge review, and through workshops on the review of the Local Plan and review of enforcement guidance.
- 5.2** For some time, the planning service has experienced under resourcing. This has been caused by reductions in staff created by reductions in service budgets and by challenges recruiting. Challenges with vacant roles across the service has put pressure on staff and has led to reduced service delivery. A backlog of applications and delay to the Local Development Framework production has resulted and there has been limited capacity to take a strategic approach to the transformation of the service.

Staff and managers in some teams are so consumed with fire-fighting and additional requirements as a result of the Council's Section 114s that they are unable to focus on proactive service delivery and improving customer service. This has resulted in residents and customers losing trust in the planning service and the ability of the service to deliver effectively.

- 5.3** The service has also suffered from a lack of strategic investment in digitalisation and IT. This has hindered case officer productivity and led to inefficient processes. The Government is seeking to drive greater digital enablement of planning processes through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, this includes much greater digital enablement of planning processes. Croydon's current IT capability in the planning service is hampering its ability to engage in the Government's agenda and improvements are urgently needed in order that the service can meet the entry level of planning digitalisation that will be required once the Bill is enacted.
- 5.4** The impact of the S114s, inefficient processes and under resourcing has been that valuable officer time away from 'softer' activities such as communications with applicants and building relationships within local communities to help enhance understanding of the planning process. The provision of important 'added value' to applicants through its pre app service has also been undermined through delays in response times and even the capability to provide basic customer service, has at times been challenging.

#### Planning Advisory Service – Peer Challenge Review

- 5.5** In recognition of the challenges that the planning service has been facing and the need for transformation, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), as an independent body, were asked to review the DM service and provide recommendations to assist in its transformation. This was in recognition that determination of planning applications against government performance targets were at threat, service standards had dropped, income was falling, resident and ward members were concerned over enforcement activity and the application backlog had increased to unacceptable levels. Case officers had unsustainable caseloads and the wider engagement work, which is good practice with residents and developers had been reduced to a minimum to allow officers to focus on determining applications. Complaints, members and MP enquiries were at levels that were challenging to manage, and officers were targeted on social media and this, with workload pressures, had contributed to the low morale in the service.
- 5.6** The PAS peer challenge review was completed in June 2022. The PAS reports and recommendations can be found at **Appendix 1**. These recommendations and the process of the review have helped to inform a draft Planning Transformation Action Plan (**see Appendix 2**).
- 5.7** The DM service asked PAS to consider the following areas:
- Development management performance.
  - Efficiencies and effectiveness of Planning Committee
  - Enforcement
  - Relationship with customers and management of complaints
  - Planning staff structures

The review was undertaken within the context of:

- Vision and leadership
- Service Performance & Management
- Community engagement
- Partner engagement
- Achieving outcomes

- 5.8** The Development Management Process Review looked in greater detail at DM performance and the processes and procedures followed by the team to deliver its DM function.
- 5.9** PAS provided a thorough and detailed analysis through interviews with officers, members, applicants, and resident associations. The key report findings identified that whilst many practices and procedures were good and even best practice, others were causing officers to work inefficiently. The lack of resourcing was a significant problem with the service at breaking point and that whilst the DM service is a major income source, it had not been sufficiently resourced to optimise the generation of income.
- 5.10** The PAS review panel also found that there was a significant breakdown in communication and trust between officers, members, and the public, however PAS identified an opportunity to reset and rebuild trust and there is a clear willingness from officers and members to learn from elsewhere and from each other.
- 5.11** To ensure that improvements could be made PAS were clear on the need for the service and officers to have the capacity and resources for
- driving improvements
  - engaging with internal and external stakeholders
  - training and development.
- 5.12** The draft Action Planning Transformation Plan (**appendix 2**) draws together recommendations across both of the PAS reports. To address the fundamental issue of lack of resourcing, a Planning Service Improvement Manager is to be recruited for a Fixed term period of two years, this post will take the lead on the delivery of the Transformation Programme and provide capacity to drive change. To provide governance and assurance a Planning Transformation Board has been set up which reports to the SCRER Transformation Board. The commencement and implementation of the Transformation programme is conditional on the appointment of a Planning Service Improvement Manager.
- 5.13** The recommendations of the PAS reviews have been grouped in the following areas:
- Resource and Performance Management
  - Technological Improvements
  - Officer Training, Development, Morale, and Retention
  - Internal Process Review
  - Communication and Engagement
  - Planning Policy, Procedure Development
  - Planning Committee

#### **5.14** Resource and Performance Management

The PAS Review found that the service benefits from a high quality of officers who are professional and dedicated and the current staffing structure meets the planning requirements of Croydon. However, the number of officers is insufficient, and PAS found in June 2022 that the service is currently firefighting and losing. Enforcement has specific issues with responses to enforcement enquiries not meeting residents and member expectations.

#### **5.15** Technological Improvements

The PAS review found that Uniform and IT processes are used inefficiently creating duplication of activities and the way IT is set up and used is not fit for purpose and wastes resources. The transformation of the Planning service's IT needs to be a key focus of wider IT investment through the Council's transformation programme. This will speed up processes, increase productivity and avoid wasteful use of officer time. Data standards and digitisation is a key part of impending planning reforms and it is important the Council are not left lagging behind other authorities.

The better utilisation of Uniform is an early win through drawing on existing knowledge within the Council and the wider London borough LPA network.

#### **5.16** Officer, Training, Development, Morale and Retention

Staff wellbeing was raised as key concern during the PAS review with unmanageable workloads and the pressures they receive from applicants, the community, and social media. Staff needed to be better supported to deliver and to feel valued.

The PAS review recommends that Job descriptions should be reviewed to ensure these accurately reflect performance management and complexity of workload and measures put in place to provide more formal opportunities for staff to raise concerns and issues around morale and training and development. A Strategy for staff retention and development should also be part of this.

#### **5.17** Internal Processes

The PAS review recognised that the service has some excellent practices. There is a sound scheme of delegation, and some sound processes and procedures in place, including the Major Applications weekly meeting, which allows management oversight of major and complex applications to provide a strategic steer and as a training opportunity for junior officers. The DM Manual is an exemplar of national best practice. Officer reports are very high quality and clear. Pre-app and PPAs are well thought of by agents for Major developments and there are good relationships between individual officers and consultees.

However, the PAS review highlighted that the approach to validation is causing major problems and a bottleneck. It seeks to balance - performance versus customer service but currently does not achieve either. There is too much management time taken up with complaints and issues with vexatious complainants. There is a lack of internal consultee support, particularly within legal which is impacting on performance and sound decision making.



## **5.18 Communications and Engagement**

The PAS review found that whilst there are some good individual relationships between planning officers, residents, consultees and interested parties, there is a general need to re-build trust and relationships between Members, officers, and residents. The lack of communication with the public and applicants has arisen from the reduced resources and the pandemic and this has helped to create suspicion, a perception of bias and a lack of transparency, which has contributed to a breakdown in trust. PAS recommended that additional resource and a Communications strategy to counter the negative narrative that is impacting officer morale and affecting recruitment and retention.

Proactive communications could be undertaken to demonstrate action on enforcement and through additional information on the website to demonstrate how the Council manages conflicts of interest.

There are many knowledgeable and active community groups and these are an asset who the planning service need to collaborate more with. The existing twice yearly Developer Forums and Residents Association meetings are identified as good practice, but more could be done to embrace residents desire to get involved in planning so that it is a more positive relationship.

## **5.19 Policy Development**

The PAS review recognised the process of the Local Plan Review as an example of good plan making. The review acknowledges the need to retain a strong policy framework and work collaboratively on the Local Plan Review to avoid significant delays in the plan making process and subsequent potential unintended consequences of reduced local decision-making powers. An appropriate replacement to SPD2 should be progressed to ensure there is continued consistent decision-making and this gives a valuable opportunity to build relationships and understanding between officers and members on policy development.

## **5.20 Planning Committee**

PAS recognised that the Planning Committee were new when they undertook the Peer Challenge and this provided an ideal opportunity for officers and councillors to work together in rebuilding mutual trust and improve the operation of the Planning Committee. It was recognised that there was a need to create more productive and collaborative Planning Committee meetings where councillors and officers work together to make sound and defensible decisions.

Planning is extremely high profile in the Borough, with a high housing target, significant developer interest and active Resident Associations, which have all contributed to the planning service having high levels of political engagement. This creates a significant number of member and MP enquiries, complaints and FOIs.

The Resident Engagement work is anticipated to assist with this, but there is also a need to ensure members also have sufficient and appropriate training. The PAS Review found there was a commitment to ongoing training and to learn from best practice and that this should include Ward Members. A review of the two Planning Committees was recommended to ensure that requirements on speed, quality and delivery were optimised balanced with openness and transparency.

## 6. THE PLANNING TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME STRUCTURE AND WORKSTREAMS

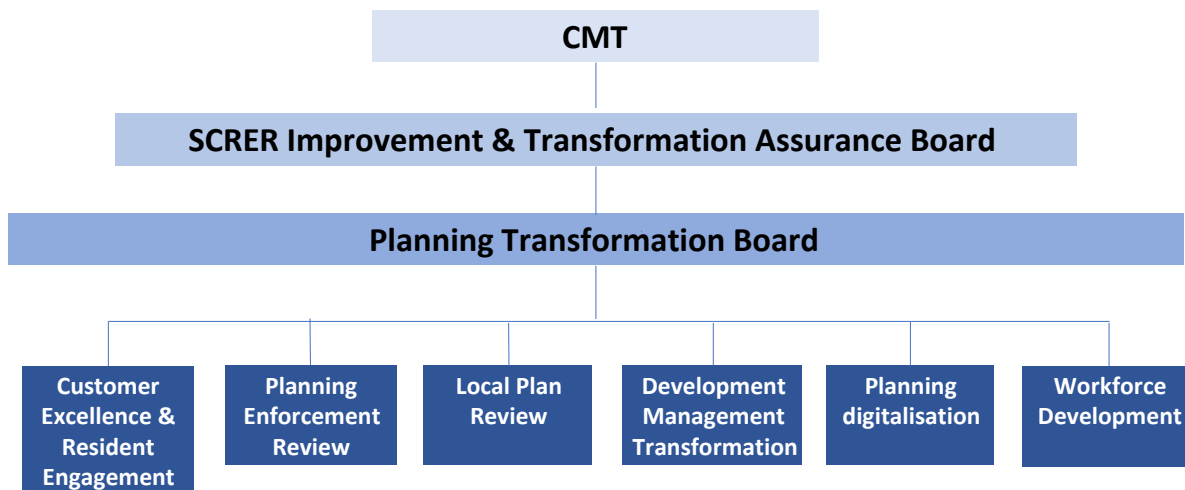
6.1 Diagram 1 depicts the proposed transformation programme architecture in this draft stage. The aim of the programme structure is to create the workstreams and governance that will oversee and deliver the whole of the transformation of the Local Planning Authority – including the delivery of the recommendations of the PAS review.

6.2 There are 6 workstreams which make up the programme:

1. Customer service and resident engagement. The aim will be to refocus the service on the delivery of consistently good and working towards excellent customer service and to ensure a culture of regular engagement with residents, customers and partners.
2. Local Development Framework (LDF) Programme (Local Development Scheme). The key component of the LDF programme is the review of the local plan workstream and will be overseen by the LDF Board, which will report into the Planning Transformation Board. The review of the local plan will seek to remove intensification zones, support sustainable development and emphasise design and character over density. This workstream will also oversee the residential extensions and alterations SPD, the review of HMO policies, replacement design guidance SPD, Purley Way Masterplan SPD, production of Conservation Area Appraisal, Planning Obligations SPD and review of the Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule, alongside the annual statutory functions such as the Authority's Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement.
3. Development Management Transformation. This workstream will deliver service improvement and efficiencies with the core development management service, through the delivery of the recommendations of the PAS review. The draft Development Management Transformation Action plan appears at **Appendix 2**.
4. Review of the Planning Enforcement Service. This will include a review of the enforcement guidance to ensure that resources are identified and focused to improve the service for customers.
5. Digitalisation of the Planning Service. Plan making, development management, placemaking and assessing development proposals are key areas where maximising digital tools can create efficiencies. With the focus on data standards and digitisation contained in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, this workstream will ensure that IT systems are upgraded to respond to the digitalisation agenda.
6. Culture change, workforce and skills. Good planners can work around an imperfect planning system, but a perfect planning system can't work around a shortage of good planners. This workstream will aim to ensure that we are able to attract and retain good planners in Croydon and will prepare and deliver a workforce development plan and enable it's workforce to deliver excellence to residents, customers, and partners.

## Diagram 1.

### Planning Transformation Programme. Governance and initial scope of programme



- 6.3 Each of the workstreams will contain several projects each with their own project lead. The overall programme plan is currently being developed which will detail timeframes, risks, stakeholders, impact on customer, impact on business, interdependencies, outcomes, cost, and measures of success.
- 6.4 The workstreams report regularly into a new Transformation Steering Board which has reporting lines into SCRER Improvement & Transformation Board and the Corporate Management Team, the Political governance structure (Cabinet Member for Planning & Regeneration, Executive Mayor, Scrutiny, Cabinet). We anticipate the Board to meet monthly.
- 6.5 In addition, we will work with appropriate Resident Associations and development partners to ensure we have captured accurately the drivers that we are responding to, that our approach is appropriately engaging and that the solutions are designed with residents, customers and partners in mind.

## 7. PLANNING TRANSFORMATION BOARD MEMBERSHIP

- 7.1 We are seeking broader membership for the Transformation Steering board. The Board will seek representation from across the organisation and will involve key colleagues whose services and input will be impacted by the programme.
- 7.2 The delivery of the Planning Transformation Programme will remain a corporate priority through regular reporting from the Planning Transformation Board to the Corporate Management Team, and the inclusion of senior officers on the Board.
- 7.3 The Planning Transformation Steering Board will include the following members:
- Corporate Director Sustainable Communities, Regeneration & Economy Recovery
  - Planning Service Improvement Manager (Transformation Lead)
  - Director of Planning & Sustainable Regeneration
  - Head of Spatial Planning, Growth Zone & Regeneration
  - Head of Development Management

- Communications representative
- Nomination from Digital services
- Nomination from Finance
- Legal representative
- EDI representative

## **8. LINKAGES WITH OTHER INTERNAL CONTROL BOARDS**

8.1 There are several other internal governance structures which form part of the programme. Internal control boards linked to the Transformation Programme's governance include those that:

- Oversee digital solutions (Digital Approvals Board and Digital Internal Control Board)
- Support through appropriate programme management (PMO)
- Ensure the inclusion of resident voice in all we do (Resident Voice Internal Control Board) and

Links will be formed with further governance boards as the organisation itself evolves its governance structure thereby ensuring that we have sufficient governance and engagement from across the organisation and can work collaboratively to deliver holistic services.

## **9. RESOURCES AND TIMESCALES**

9.1 The Planning Transformation Programme has been allocated £300k funding for the delivery of the programme. A Planning Service Improvement Manager is being recruited to act as the transformation lead officer. Projects within the programme will be resourced using appropriately skilled staff. In many instances, we will seek to utilise existing resources but with expert direction. However, there will be some projects which, we anticipate, will be led by external consultants with very specific experience and skills. In these instances, we will ensure appropriate internal staff form a key part of the project team. The projects will be managed closely for VFM delivery, but we would also look for opportunities to transfer skills into the organisation where practical.

9.2 We anticipate this being at least a two-year programme with delivery in phases. We also anticipate that the workstreams will evolve as we progress through the programme delivery.

## **10 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

10.1 The Planning Transformation programme is being drafted to respond to the Planning Advisory Service Review (PAS) recommendations. The PAS review considered options and made recommendations for the transformation of the service.

## **11 CONSULTATION**

11.1 Consultation and engagement on the draft transformation programme will take place during February and March 2023. This will include engagement with the borough's Residents Associations, the Developer's Forum and business associations, such as Develop Croydon and the borough's Business Improvement Districts.

**11.2** Streets & Environment Scrutiny Sub-Committee will consider the Planning Transformation Programme in March 2023.

## **12. CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

**12.1** The Executive Mayor's Business Plan has a number of priorities which require the transformation of the planning service. These are outlined in paragraph 4.3 of this report.

## **13. IMPLICATIONS**

### **13.1 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

#### **13.1.1** Effect of the decision

In the 2023/20224 MTFS Budget Proposals there is a £1m budget adjustment to realign the Income Budget which has shown a shortfall in income throughout 2023/2024, specifically in connection with the downturn of Major Applications. 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022 approved a £300k Transformation Budget which will be used to fund the transformation programme. Of the £300k transformation budget £100k is earmarked for improvements to the Planning Services Uniform IT System, whilst the rest will be earmarked for the recruitment of a Planning Improvement Manager on a fixed term contract for two years.

#### **13.1.2** Financial Risks

The proposed improvement of the existing IT will be largely focused on fully exploiting the capabilities of the modules of the existing Uniform platform. This should result in fewer manual operations and work arounds, that require the use of standalone spreadsheets and systems and allow modules to link more seamlessly together. This will include optimising existing and future GIS and identifying new applications. However, the existing system may not be fit for purpose and the delayed re-procurement of Uniform may need to be brought forward and capital funding identified if Uniform is found to be not fit for purpose.

The economy is experiencing a downturn, which is seeing some private sector planning consultancies and developers shedding staff and this is impacting the planning service through a reduction in the major applications. These applications generate the larger fee income and help subsidise the costs of the household applications. If the reduction in major applications continues, this may mean that the proposed budget realignment of £1m will not be sufficient. This would also affect the ability for the service to deliver the agreed transformation savings, but these would be minimised due the changes which would be implemented. It should be noted that Planning Applications are led by demand and if this is in a downturn then the ability to achieve income budgets will always be affected regardless of how the service is performing. Staffing numbers will be kept under review as part of this mitigation; however, the Planning Service still have a backlog of applications to process.

### **13.1.3** Future savings/efficiencies

The Government are proposing to consult this Spring on the current Statutory Charges associated with planning applications which may mitigate further income shortfalls if the downturn in applications continue. At this point though, there is no indication of when or by how much any changes may deliver/be delivered.

### **13.1.4** Comments approved by Darrell Jones Acting Head of Finance (SCRER) on behalf of the S151 Officer

## **13.2 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**13.2.1** This report recommends consultation of a draft Transformation Action Plan. Aspects of the Action Plan will require input and from other departments within the Council. Some recommendations will require additional governance processes to be followed before final approvals, for example any changes to Schemes of Delegation or to the Constitution.

**13.2.2** The Executive Mayor has the power to exercise executive functions pursuant to s9E of the Local Government Act 2000 and has the power to delegate those functions. This report seeks relevant delegations to exercise executive functions.

**13.2.3** Comments approved by the Head of Commercial & Property Law on behalf of the Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer. (Date 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023)

## **13.3 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

**13.3.1** As a public body, the Council is required to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty [PSED], as set out in the Equality Act 2010. The PSED requires the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities. Failure to meet these requirements may result in the Council being exposed to costly, time consuming and reputation-damaging legal challenges.

**13.3.2** The transformation is designed to enhance the delivery of service to residents and also to raise the morale of staff who may have been affected by lack of resource that had caused an increase in work and challenged the mental health of some employees. The proposals do not impact negatively on the current staffing levels with no staff being made redundant and resources increased if need is identified.

**13.3.3** Historically though the service is open to all residents, the residents in communication with the service have been largely in the older age groups. The service has indicated that they need to improve the relationship and communication with the whole community including those who are of a younger age group. Efforts will be made to develop the relationship across the range of residents, this includes people from seldom heard groups as detailed in Equality Strategy 2020 -2024. Improvements will also be made to how the service is delivered to Disabled residents who may have difficulties reading the text used in planning applications. The service will ensure that its consultation documents are compliant with the standards of the British Dyslexia Association. Staff members who are able to support residents who are non neuro typical and may have

conditions such as dementia or dyslexia will be on hand to support residents at public events. An EQIA is being developed and will be signed off on 13 February 2023

**13.3.4** Comments approved by Denise McCausland Equalities Programme Manager. 09/022023

#### **13.4 HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

**13.4.1** There is an HR impact associated with this report in that a Planning Improvement Manager is to be recruited in order for this work to progress. The recruitment will be managed under the Council's Recruitment Policy.

**13.4.2** If any other issues arise these will be managed in line under the Council's Policies and Procedures.

**13.4.3** Approved by: Jennifer Sankar, Head of HR Housing Directorate and SCRER Directorate for and on behalf of Dean Shoemith, Chief People Officer. 19/01/2023

#### **14. APPENDICES**

**14.1** Appendix 1 - PAS reports and recommendations

**14.2** Appendix 2 - draft Planning Transformation Action Plan

#### **15. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

**15.1** Independent Governance Review

**15.2** Levelling -up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy