

LONDON BOROUGH OF CROYDON

REPORT:	CABINET	
DATE OF DECISION	31 January 2024	
REPORT TITLE:	Results of Croydon Residents' Survey – Autumn 2023	
CORPORATE DIRECTOR	Elaine Jackson, Assistant Chief Executive	
LEAD OFFICER:	David Courcoux, Director of Policy, Programmes and Performance Susie Rundle, Head of Communications and Engagement	
KEY DECISION?	NO	N/A
CONTAINS EXEMPT INFORMATION?	NO	N/A
WARDS AFFECTED:	All	

1 SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 As part of the Executive Mayor's commitment to ensure the council is listening to residents, the council commissioned an independent research company to carry out Croydon Council's first statistically significant residents' survey in several years.
- 1.2 This report asks the Executive Mayor in cabinet to note the results of the residents' survey carried out in autumn 2023 and how this feedback will be incorporated into future transformation and service plans. Also, to agree the timing for the next survey.
- 1.3 This supports the delivery of the outcomes in the Executive Mayor's Business Plan 2022-2026 - listening to Croydon and delivering good, sustainable services and value for money; as well as the delivery of the Improvement and Assurance Panel's Exit Strategy.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- 2.1 To note the results of the Croydon residents' survey – autumn 2023 (Appendix A)

2.2 To note that the council's transformation plan, service planning and other processes will all review the results and incorporate actions to respond to resident feedback.

2.3 To agree that the council will carry out targeted deep-dive analysis and engagement with representative groups of residents during 2024. A further comparable residents' survey would then be conducted in 2025 as set out in section 5.3 of the report.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The council is committed to rebuilding its relationship with the people of Croydon after the governance and financial crisis of previous years. A key part of that, as set out in the Executive Mayor's Business Plan, is building an organisation that listens to local people. This residents' survey is one part of that process. It helps officers and members to understand what is important to Croydon's diverse communities and what they think about the council - the way it is run, the services it provides, whether it offers value for money and whether it keeps them informed. It also provides valuable insight into how they feel about Croydon the place - the towns, neighbourhoods and streets they call home.

3.2 Measuring resident satisfaction levels supports the delivery of good sustainable services and is best practice in local authorities. The introduction of comparable annual surveys will enable the council to chart performance over time, and to benchmark against other local authorities regionally and nationally. It will also support the council's aim to become a more open, transparent and accountable organisation. The results of these surveys will provide data to drive service improvement and to monitor, and address, any changes in satisfaction levels over time. This will support the council to meet its Best Value Duty, having regard to 'a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness' and ensuring it is accountable primarily to local residents.

3.3 Croydon's Improvement and Assurance Panel published their Exit Strategy in October 2023. The strategy sets key measurables that will enable the panel to be confident that the council is on a pathway of sustainable improvement. Conducting a residents' survey is listed as an objective in support of organisational change, as it will help to create a culture where the council puts residents first. The results from the residents' survey will inform the council's transformation strategy and shape service planning across the organisation.

4 BACKGROUND AND DETAILS

4.1 It is recognised best practice for local authorities to conduct regular residents' surveys, in order to provide a representative view of satisfaction levels with councils and the local area. The Local Government Association (LGA) conducts national telephone polling three times a year and regional level results are published on a

yearly basis.

- 4.2 A regular residents' survey supports the council to have a statistically valid understanding of what is most important to our diverse communities and what they think about the council - the way it is run, the services it provides, whether it provides value for money and whether it keeps them well informed. It also provides valuable insight into how they feel about Croydon the place, and the streets and neighbourhoods they call home. Conducting a residents' survey is part of a wider, ongoing journey to improve the quality of the council's relationship with its communities.
- 4.3 Croydon Council has not conducted a statistically significant residents' survey in recent years. Following the governance and financial collapse of the council in 2020, a series of reports into governance failings highlighted the need for greater transparency and accountability. It is likely that the governance failures of recent years as well as the subsequent Section 114 Notices, savings programmes and service changes required as a result, will have had a significant impact on resident confidence and satisfaction. As this is the first resident survey since those changes this is likely to be reflected in the opinions expressed and in the results.
- 4.4 Listening to residents and delivering good, sustainable services is the first of five priority outcomes in the Executive Mayor's Business Plan 2022-2026 as well as a key pillar of the Mayor's election promise to residents. While the survey was under way by this point, an action to conduct regular residents' surveys was also included as an objective in the Improvement and Assurance Panel's Exit Strategy published in October 2023 in order to support the delivery of organisational and cultural change, to ensure the council puts residents first.
- 4.5 Following a competitive tender exercise, DJS Research were commissioned to conduct a programme of residents' surveys and research. This report provides the results of the first of these pieces of work, a residents' survey which was conducted between September and December 2023.
- 4.6 The Local Government Association (LGA) has developed questions and guidance to enable councils carrying out surveys in their own areas to compare results. Croydon's survey is based on industry best practice methodology and the questions have been developed in line with LGA guidance to enable benchmarking against national and regional comparators, and to support the delivery of corporate objectives in the Mayor's Business Plan.
- 4.7 As this is the first survey for some time, the 2023 results will provide a baseline for measuring performance in future years. The LGA did carry out some telephone polling for the council during August and September 2021 as noted at section 5.1.12 below.

4.8 The results of the autumn 2023 residents' survey will be communicated across the organisation so that they can inform service planning and will be used to shape the council's wider transformation and improvement plans.

4.9 In addition to measuring satisfaction with council services, the survey measures resident perceptions of Croydon the place, and views on a range of partnership issues including crime and safety, health and education. The council will share the findings with agencies and partners across the public, private and community sector, to ensure that together, they deliver a collective response.

5.1 METHODOLOGY

5.1.1 DJS Research carried out the fieldwork from September-December 2023. DJS carried out face-to-face interviews (in-street) as they have found this method provides the most effective and cost-efficient way of reaching diverse populations.

5.1.2 A random locational quota sampling method was used to ensure a representative sample of responses. Random locations within Croydon's ward clusters (North East, North West, Central East, Central West, South East and South West) were selected as areas for interviewers to complete a set number of interviews.

5.1.3 This method ensures a broad geographic coverage of the borough. Further to this, demographic quotas are then set by age, gender, ethnicity, working status and sexual orientation within each of the areas. The demographic quotas were defined using the Census 2021 and the ONS population estimates for 2021.

5.1.4 The number of interviews conducted was 1,694 - above the 1,000 widely regarded by the sector and within LGA guidance as an acceptable level of accuracy for a survey of this nature. A sample of 1,000 gives a margin of error of +/-3.1% on an observed statistic of 50% at the 95% confidence interval. However, using a higher sample provides a greater level of confidence in the data at sub-group level, allowing us to explore statistical significance by different breakdowns, for example by ward cluster or by ethnicity. A sample size of 1,700 gives a sampling error of +/-2.4% at a total level, but more importantly, reduces the margin of error per ward cluster to circa +/-7%.

5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

5.2.1 The results highlight a number of key themes for the council, including a need to rebuild trust with residents, value for money, resident involvement in decision making and community cohesion and safety.

5.2.2 A summary of headline findings is set out below with the full independent analysis of the results across all 24 questions of the survey set out at Appendix A.

Croydon the place

- 5.2.3 In Croydon 69% of respondents were satisfied with their local area as a place to live (69%). This is 6% lower than the average national figure of 75% and 9% lower than the London benchmark of 77%.
- 5.2.4 Croydon's good public transport links are perceived as one of the best things about living in Croydon by residents (45%), along with the variety of shops (23%) and the availability of parks and open spaces for residents to enjoy (22%). Amenities/leisure facilities, Croydon generally being a good location and schools/education are also mentioned but less frequently.
- 5.2.5 57% of residents state that it is important for them to personally feel they can influence decisions in their local area however only 34% currently felt they can influence decisions made by public services such as health, police and the council, that affect their local area. When asked if they would like to be more involved in decision making 24% of residents said yes with a further 29% stating that it would depend on the issue.
- 5.2.6 There are key differences by ward cluster, with residents in Central West and Central East frequently being significantly less satisfied and also feeling less able to influence local decisions in comparison to their neighbouring ward clusters.

Croydon Council

- 5.2.7 45% of residents are satisfied with the way Croydon Council runs things. This is 11% points below the October 2023 LGA benchmark.
- 5.2.8 Within these responses there are significant differences between ward clusters, with 58% of North West residents being satisfied with how the council run things compared with only 32% in the Central East cluster. Across the borough, residents who have lived in Croydon for 5+ years are also significantly less likely to be satisfied compared to those who have lived in the area for up to a year (41% compared with 55%).
- 5.2.9 When asked the reasoning for their scores, residents who are satisfied often recite positive experiences with council services or staff interaction, whereas those who are dissatisfied reference the councils' previous financial crisis.
- 5.2.10 Along with council satisfaction, residents' ratings in terms of value for money (34%) and keeping residents informed (41%) also come in below the LGA benchmark (-6% points, -15% points).
- 5.2.11 When asked about trust in the council 45% said they trusted the council 'a great deal' or 'a fair amount. This is 10% points lower than the LGA benchmark.
- 5.2.12 While there has not been a resident survey of this scale in recent years, some independent research was carried out by the LGA on behalf of the council in August and September 2021. A representative sample of 501 residents was surveyed, primarily to ascertain residents' preferred means of receiving information from the

council. The survey did however include a question about resident trust – how much do you trust Croydon Council? In response 24% of respondents said they trusted the council ‘a great deal’ or a ‘fair amount’.

5.2.13 As with overall satisfaction, there are significant differences between ward clusters, demographic groups and length of residency in Croydon on these measures.

5.2.14 Just over two in five residents (41%) feel as though Croydon Council keeps them informed about the services and benefits it provides. This places Croydon Council’s performance 15% points below the LGA benchmark for this metric. 41% of residents felt that Croydon Council listens to them and 48% said they felt the council does not act on the concerns of local residents – this is 5% points higher than the LGA benchmark.

5.2.15 The most important services provided by the council were keeping streets safe, clean and well lit (47%), children, young people and education (46%), rubbish and recycling collection (44%) and support for the elderly and vulnerable adults (41%).

Croydon’s communities

5.2.16 Croydon residents think highly of their local communities, with 82% agreeing that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. 78% agree that they feel a sense of belonging to their local area and 61% believe that people in their local area pull together to improve the place they live in.

Feeling safe

5.2.17 88% of Croydon residents report feeling safe in their local area in the daytime and 61% report feeling safe in the evening. According to LGA polls, this compares with 90% of residents feeling safe during the day nationally and 71% at night.

5.2.18 At both times of day there are consistent subgroup differences, whereby some residents feel less safe than others, including residents with a disability, females and more deprived residents.

5.3 Next steps

5.3.1 Since the October 2020 Report in the Public Interest and subsequent S114 Notices, Croydon Council has entered a period of significant political, managerial and organisational change. This survey provides a baseline for the council to understand the experiences and perceptions of residents towards the council, the wider borough and the key issues facing them following that period.

5.3.2 The results of the survey will be widely shared with officers in the council as well as partner organisations across the borough and will be used to shape and inform service planning and improvement in the coming year.

- 5.3.3 While there are already improvement programmes in place for many of the areas residents have identified as issues, for example customer service and telephony, the updated Transformation Strategy currently in development will set out how the council will reshape services to better deliver for local residents and rebuild the relationship between Croydon Council and the residents in the borough.
- 5.3.4 To provide greater insight into the results and ensure that council improvement activity is focused on resident priorities, it is recommended that further deep-dive analysis and follow-up engagement with residents is carried out over 2024. This engagement would be designed and delivered by the council in conjunction with independent market research experts, to provide greater depth of understanding of resident sentiments and the reasons behind it, for example through the use of targeted focus groups.
- 5.3.5 A similar independent resident survey would then be conducted in 2025 providing comparable data on resident perception and opinion.
- 5.3.6 Given the scale of the long-term systemic transformation Croydon Council is undertaking, as well as the significant financial savings required of the council to reduce its £1.6bn debt, it is likely changes in the lived experience of residents will take time to be reflected in annual survey results.
- 5.3.7 However, this research will be important in helping the council to improve the quality of its relationship with residents. Understanding key drivers of resident satisfaction, and local perceptions, will support the council in its aim to move from a transactional relationship with residents, to one where local people are engaged as active citizens, involved in decision-making and co-designing services. This will ultimately help to rebuild trust.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 6.1 Croydon Council has not carried out a statistically significant residents' survey on this scale for several years and the option of continuing to not deliver one was considered, given the council's current financial situation. This option was discounted as the results of the survey will provide invaluable insight into the priorities and perceptions of residents which will be utilised when designing services and our continuing transformation programme.
- 6.2 The council could choose not to carry out the proposed further engagement activity however this would limit the council's insight into the views of residents, reducing the ability of the council to properly address areas of concern.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 7.1 Becoming a council which listens to, respects and works in partnership with Croydon's diverse communities and businesses is a priority in the Mayor's Business Plan 2022-2026.

This priority supports the delivery of the first outcome in the plan - the council balances its books, listens to residents' and delivers good sustainable services.

7.2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.2.1 Finance have been consulted and can confirm that any costs relating to this report can be met within existing budgets.

7.2.1 DJS Research has already been commissioned to conduct three pieces of research for the council. This includes the first residents' survey at a cost of £33,500, with further funding allocated for future resident surveys and research. This spend is within the agreed budget framework and consistent with corporate objectives as set out in the report.

7.2.3 Conducting a residents' survey, which monitors resident satisfaction levels with the services the council provides and the way it is run, supports the council to meet its duty in terms of best value. Resident surveys are an essential tool for Local Authorities and enable the council to remain on a pathway of continuous improvement, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and assists in evidencing its accountability to local residents.

7.2.4 Comments approved by Lesley Shields, Head of Finance for Assistant Chief Executive and Resources on behalf of the Director of Finance. 06/1/23

7.3 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.3.1 There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report. If any actions are identified as a result of the findings of the Croydon Residents' Survey (Autumn 2023), the legal implications of those will be considered at the time.

7.3.2 Approved by: Sandra Hebert, Head of Litigation and Corporate Law on behalf of Stephen Lawrence-Orumwense, Director of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer (18/01/2024).

7.4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

7.4.1 Conducting the survey in itself does not have an impact. The survey results are likely to have some impact on people because they will inform future service planning and transformation planning. If any actions are identified as a result of the findings of the Croydon Residents' Survey (Autumn 2023), the equalities implications of those will be considered at the time.

7.4.2 DJS Research's approach was designed to maximise response rates and quality of data from groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act, those with language requirements, and disadvantaged residents. Quotas were set in alignment with the borough profile.

7.4.3 They implemented a range of techniques to ensure the research was as inclusive and accessible as it can be, recognising that Croydon is a diverse borough in terms of ethnicity,

sexual orientation, nationality, religion and language. These included:

- All DJS face-to-face interviewers are Interviewer Quality Control Scheme trained and received comprehensive training on the project prior to it starting,
- The survey questions were formally piloted before fieldwork commenced. A total of 30 interviews were conducted with residents, ensuring a good representation of age, gender, ethnicity, working status, disability and sexual orientation. The pilot tested the comprehension of the survey questions, the full survey process including the length of the survey, the impact of the introduction on response rates and non-response, and how well the script was working, including routing of questions.
- Across their team of London-based face-to-face interviewers DJS has the capability of conducting interviews in more than 20 languages. During the design stages, they assessed the ethnic and language profiles of Croydon's communities and allocated interviewers based on their matched demographic profile.
- Interviews are conducted at different times and days of the week to give everyone an equal chance of taking part in the survey irrespective of childcare responsibilities, employment, or religious commitments etc. Interviewers conducted at least a third of their interviews at weekends, a third in the week before 5pm and a third in the week after 5pm. This is monitored as a KPI for each interviewer.

7.4.2 DJS set a monitoring quota by disability to ensure a representative spread of responses from these residents. Interviewers provided large-font paper copies of the survey to be self-completed where required or paper copies to those who are hard of hearing. Libraries were also contacted and asked to provide a seat or quiet space for interviews as needed.

7.4.5 Comment approved by Naseer Ahmad for the Equalities Manager, (23/01/2024)

DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- **WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?**

Yes

- **HAS A DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT (DPIA) BEEN COMPLETED?**

As part of the tender exercise, the successful contractor was required to complete a data processing and non-disclosure agreement and will also be required to retain the completed

survey forms in accordance with GDPR and data protection legislation.

As part of the council's contract with DJS Research, a data protection schedule was agreed including confirmation of compliance with data protection laws, data processing obligations and processing activities.

8. APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1 – Croydon residents survey – autumn 2023

8.2 Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment