

**For General Release**

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| <b>REPORT TO:</b>      | <b>CABINET 12 APRIL 2021</b>                        |
| <b>SUBJECT:</b>        | <b>Croydon Renewal Community Engagement</b>         |
| <b>LEAD OFFICER:</b>   | <b>Katherine Kerswell, Interim Chief Executive</b>  |
| <b>CABINET MEMBER:</b> | <b>Councillor Hamida Ali, Leader of the Council</b> |
| <b>WARDS:</b>          | <b>All</b>  |

**COUNCIL PRIORITY / POLICY CONTEXT**

In November 2020 the Council adopted new priorities and ways of working to replace the previous Corporate Plan priorities.

The Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan seeks to deliver against all of these priorities, and in particular, move the Council to a sustainable financial position.

One of the adopted ways of working was for the Council to become a much more transparent, open and honest council. The establishment of a Community Panel is a key element of this new way of working.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, the delivery of the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan is critical to the Council's move to a sustainable financial position and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

**FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.:** This is not a key decision

The Leader of the Council has delegated to the Cabinet the power to make the decisions set out in the recommendations below

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cabinet is recommended to

- 1.1 Agree the proposals for a series of resident webinars to provide information on the Croydon Renewal improvement plan, the actions being taken by the Council, and to answer questions and receive feedback from residents;
- 1.2 Note that a review is currently underway in relation to the Council's Get Involved platform, which supports consultation and engagement with residents;
- 1.3 Establish a Citizens e-Panel as detailed in paragraphs 5.10 - 5.15 to form a representatives and retained sample of residents to inform Council decision making as part of the Croydon Renewal Plan; and

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| <p>1.4 Subject to approval of recommendation 1.3, authorise the Interim Chief Executive to finalise the arrangements for a Citizens e-Panel, including terms of reference and membership, and undertake Equality Impact Assessment and complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment, prior to implementation, as necessary.</p> |
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## **2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2.1 This report provides an update on the proposals for community engagement within the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan. These were submitted to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHLG) in December 2020 as part of the Council's capitalisation request.
- 2.2 As reported to Cabinet in February 2021, the Council has paused establishing an External Improvement Board following the Secretary of State's decision to establish an Improvement and Assurance Board.
- 2.3 This report summarises the Council's current engagement and consultation activities and channels. It also sets out options and proposals for extending these in accordance with the Council's new priorities, which include the aim to increase openness and transparency with residents.
- 2.4 This includes proposals for a series of webinars to provide information to residents on the Croydon Renewal improvement plan, the actions being taken by the Council, and to answer questions and receive feedback from residents. The report also sets out proposals to establish a representative and retained sample of residents to operate as a Citizens e-Panel as part of the Croydon Renewal Plan (subject to the conclusion of the review of the Council's Get Involved platform).

## **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 When the Council submitted a request for a capitalisation direction to MHCLG in December 2020, this included the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan, setting out how the Council would deliver improvements across a wide range of programmes.
- 3.2 Whilst these programmes have moved to mobilisation and implementation, it is important to note that the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan is a 3-5 year programme.
- 3.3 On Friday 5 March, MHCLG confirmed that the Council's request for capitalisation in 2020/21 had been approved, and that the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government was minded to approve capitalisation for 2021/22, subject to demonstrating progress against the improvement plan. As a result, the Council adopted a balanced budget for 2021/22 on Monday 8 March.
- 3.4 The Secretary of State has appointed an Improvement & Assurance Panel for

Croydon to support and advise the Council on its progress in delivering the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan and provide quarterly reports to MHCLG.

3.5 In November 2020 the Cabinet approved draft terms of reference and membership for a Croydon External Improvement Board, as well as a community panel. Since then the MHCLG Improvement & Assurance Panel has been appointed.

3.6 However, it is important that a relationship with the communities of Croydon be established in regard to the delivery of the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan. This report sets out proposals to support community engagement.

#### **4. EXTERNAL IMPROVEMENT BOARD AND COMMUNITY PANEL**

4.1 Whilst developing the Croydon Renewal Improvement plan, the Council fully recognised the importance of external support and challenge. In November 2020 the Cabinet and Council approved draft terms of reference for an External Improvement Board, as well as proposals for a community panel that would provide input to the External Improvement Board.

4.2 Under the draft terms of reference, meetings of the External Improvement Board were to be held in public, with a question and answer session for residents mirroring the Council's public question time at Full Council.

4.3 At the time of approving the draft terms of reference, it was intended that the External Improvement Board would be reporting to MHCLG providing updates on the delivery of the Croydon Renewal Plan on a quarterly basis. However, in February 2021 the Secretary of State appointed a separate Improvement & Assurance Panel to undertake this work. The panel is not meeting in public.

4.4 In February 2021, the Cabinet received an update on the Croydon Renewal Improvement Plan. This report included updates on the above matters and feedback from the consultation undertaken by the Council on proposals for an External Improvement Board and community panel. The Cabinet resolved to undertake further stakeholder engagement to develop a Community Panel proposal and pause implementation of any External Improvement Board, for review in July 2021. As detailed in section 5 below, it is proposed in this report that the Community Panel requirement be met by the establishment of a Citizen's e-Panel.

4.5 The Council was required to submit plans to MHCLG as part of the capitalisation request. These set out how the Council will move to a sustainable financial position, and the areas where reductions in spend will be necessary. For example, the plan included for social care spend to reduce to the London Average per head of population; Croydon is currently one of the highest spend per head of population in this area.

4.6 Therefore the community engagement will be focused on informing and consulting on implementation of the plan.

## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1 The Council has a range of consultation, engagement and communication activities. These include:
- Email newsletters, covering a wide range of topics
  - Your Croydon digital magazine
  - Social media, including a number of accounts on Twitter, Facebook as well as Instagram and YouTube content
  - Press releases and briefings
  - Ward Councillor engagement with residents
- 5.2 There are also targeted engagement activities with particular groups of residents and communities or around particular services. For example, there are designated tenant engagement channels, which are also being strengthened as set out in a separate report on the agenda.
- 5.3 In addition, the Council publishes a range of data to support openness and transparency and meet statutory requirements. This includes spending data and senior salary level. In line with the Council's new priorities for greater transparency and openness, a wider regular performance report will also be providing regular updates on service performance, financial information, project delivery and risks.
- 5.4 The Council also undertakes a range of consultation and engagement activities in support of our service planning and decision making. The Council currently utilises a system called Get Involved to support consultation and engagement activities. This information is accessed via the Council's website: [www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk](http://www.getinvolved.croydon.gov.uk). Each consultation or engagement activity will vary depending on the topic, but all consultations are published on get Involved. The platform allows people to search through all consultations and engagements, or to focus on a particular area within the borough.
- 5.5 The Get Involved website also provides a record of past consultations and engagements. Services are able to publish a response to consultations summarising what responses were received and how the Council has responded to these. This will include where the Council has or has not made changes to proposals in response to the consultation comments – and the reasons why.
- 5.6 However, the Council's priorities recognise that more is needed to support our engagement with our residents and communities. The Croydon Renewal Plan, and our move to a sustainable financial position, will impact on services that are delivered to residents. It is therefore critical that their voice is heard when implementing the plan and delivering the Medium term Financial Strategy.
- 5.7 In recent months the Leader of the Council and the Interim Chief Executive have undertaken a series of webinars with staff to provide key updates and answer questions about the Croydon Renewal plan and the financial challenges facing the Council. Following the decision by MHCLG to accept the improvement plan and approve the Council's capitalisation request, it is recommended that a similar webinar format is utilised to engage and communicate with residents on a regular basis.

- 5.8 The proposed format would use webinars to provide information on the improvement plan, the actions being taken by the Council, and importantly, to answer questions and receive feedback from residents.
- 5.9 In addition to webinars, the Officers have reviewed a range of engagement options, including:
- Citizen advisory groups: a small group of 10 - 30 representative residents or community leaders that form a committee type group to inform and advise on decision making over an extended time. This is not recommended as the small numbers involved make representation very difficult in a borough as diverse as Croydon.
  - 21 Century town meeting: facilitated small group discussions with between 100 and 5,000 residents, which are collated instantly using technology. This is not recommended due to the high level of resources required.
  - Citizens assembly: a random sample of residents brought together (usually offline) to examine a broad policy objective, create and assess ideas and make recommendations. This is not recommended due to the high level of resources required.
  - Citizens panel / e-panel: a representative and retained sample of residents (500+), which help to identify local priorities and to consult on specific issues. Retaining the panel membership enables responses to be tracked and compared over time. It is proposed that an e-panel option be incorporated alongside the resident webinars. This provides a balance between cost/resource and reach to a larger number of residents.
- 5.10 Whilst the Get Involved platform offers a panel function, this is currently used to support broad engagement and alert people to new consultations and engagements, rather than as a representative panel.
- 5.11 The Council's Head of Communications is leading a review of the Get Involved system as the existing contract is coming to an end. The recommendation for a representative and retained sample of residents to operate as a Citizens e-Panel is to support the Croydon Renewal Plan. It is proposed that this be implemented once the review of the Get Involved system is complete. This is expected to take 2-3 months.
- 5.12 The detail of how the e-panel will operate will be dependent on the outcome of the review and the functionality of the system. It is therefore recommended that the Interim Chief Executive be authorised to finalise these arrangements after the review is concluded, including undertaking Equality Impact and Data Protection Impact Assessments, as necessary.
- 5.13 At this stage, it is intended for the e-panel to start with 100 people in a pilot phase and then be expanded up to 500 people as the process is established.
- 5.14 Interested residents will be invited to join the panel through an open process, using the Council's full range of communications channels to raise awareness.

- 5.15 Panel membership will need to be representative of the community. At this stage, it is intended to use the borough profile data to reflect the borough population in the panel membership against the following criteria:
- Age (18+)
  - Disability
  - Gender
  - Geographic area
  - Race
- 5.16 It is important to recognise the limitations with any engagement approach. No engagement channel is perfect and some residents may find it difficult to engage in the proposals within this. However, and as set out earlier in the report, the proposals are in addition to the Council's existing communications, engagement and consultation activities – all of which need to consider how we reach the widest range of residents. Ward Councillors will also continue to have a key role in community engagement, particularly for heard to reach groups.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 As part of the proposals for an External Improvement Board and community panel, the Council undertook consultation in January and February. The results of this consultation were reported as part of the report to Cabinet in February 2021.
- 6.2 The proposals within this report are in addition to any statutory or common law duties around consultation. The feedback from webinars and e-panel will need to be considered alongside all other feedback that is received.

## **7 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 7.1 The proposals will predominantly require staff and councillors time to support. There will likely be a small cost on relation to any engagement platform within the Council's website.
- 7.2 The proposals within this report will, however, need to be met from the existing approved 2021/22 budget.

Approved by: Matt Davis, Acting Interim Deputy Section 151 Officer

## **8. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The Head of Litigation and Corporate Law comments on behalf of the Director of Law and Governance that in implementing any proposals arising from the recommendations in this report, the Council will need to ensure that due regard is had to Equality Act 2010 considerations and that any Data Protection implications are appropriately addressed.

- 8.2 In addition, any proposals around an e-Panel or other engagement work in relation to the Croydon Renewal Plan will not substitute or replace any of the statutory or common law requirements around consultation which will still need to be adhered to.

Approved by Sandra Herbert, Head of Litigation and Corporate Law on behalf of the Interim Director of Law and Governance & Deputy Monitoring Officer

## **9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT**

- 9.1 There are no direct human resources impacts arising from this report for Croydon Council staff, other than those raised in the report for staff time to support the webinars and engagement activity.

Approved by: Sue Moorman, Director of Human Resources

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 10.1 The Equality Act (2010) introduced the public sector duty which extends the protected characteristics covered by the public sector equality duty to include age, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, and religion or belief.
- 10.2 As set out within the report, the intention is for the panel membership to reflect the borough's population against a number of protected characteristics. The council is aware that the panel will never be representative of the entire borough and individuals with the same characteristics will have different views and opinions. Therefore, it is important to remember that this proposal is in addition to all existing engagement activities and does not replace the statutory requirements to consult residents.
- 10.3 Section 149 of the Equality Act requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
  - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
  - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 10.4 Having due regard means consciously thinking about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. This means that decision makers must be able to evidence that they have taken into account any impact of the proposals under consideration on people who share the protected characteristics before decisions are taken.
- 10.5 The proposals within this report for webinars and a citizen's e-panel will strengthen the Council's engagement and consultation with residents. The more open and transparent approach will strengthen the Council's approach to considering residents in decision making, including those who share protected characteristics.

- 10.6 There are limitations that need to be recognised. An e-panel will exclude residents that may not have access through this channel. Existing engagement channels will need to have particular regard to these groups to ensure their voice is heard. We will review the range of options and flexibility available.
- 10.7 As previously reported, the programme Steering Group includes the Council's Equality & Inclusion Manager to ensure that the Equality Duty is part of our programme and project decision making.

Approved by: Yvonne Okiyo, Equalities Manager

## **11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 11.1 There are no environmental impacts arising from this report.

## **12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT**

- 12.1 There are no crime and disorder impacts arising from this report.

## **13. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS/PROPOSED DECISION**

- 13.1 The proposals within this report for webinars and a citizen's e-panel will strengthen the Council's engagement and consultation with residents. This supports the priority to increase openness and transparency.
- 13.2 Paragraph 5.8 above set out some alternative engagement options that were considered, but are not recommended.

## **14. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS**

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

**YES**

The Council will only hold data for the purposes of ensuring the e-panel is representative. It is anticipated that the engagement platform will have appropriate data protection arrangements in place, but this will be part of the review referenced in recommendation 1.2 and implemented as part of recommendation 1.4.

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

**NO**

The Director of Policy & Partnership states that no data issues arise at this stage. Any engagement platform used will need to meet all data protection

requirements and a DPIA will be completed at the procurement stage if required.

Approved by: Gavin Handford, Director of Policy & Partnership

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**CONTACT OFFICER:** Gavin Handford, Director of Policy & Partnership

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:** None

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None