



Executive Mayor's Update to Scrutiny and Overview Committee

June 2024

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 address. This update sets out a high-level summary of the key areas of progress made during my second 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 my second year in office.
- The Council's relationship with the Improvement and Assurance Panel.
- My Administration's priorities for the year ahead.

Key Achievements

Shortly after becoming the first Executive Mayor, I developed the Mayor's Business Plan (Appendix 1) reflecting my manifesto commitments, which provides 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 are 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, with these actions being monitored at a corporate level. Over my second year in office, the Council has made significant progress in 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.

- Set a balanced budget for 2024/5.
- Published the Future Croydon Transformation Plan outlining the continuation of our improvement journey over the next five years.
- Completed seven Mayor's Question Time events, held in various locations across the borough, and attended regular community events and resident Q&As to increase accountability of the Executive Mayoralty.
- Held a budget consultation with almost 1,000 responses from residents.
- Closed financial accounts from 2019/20.
- Administered the full Household Support Fund allocation of £6,027,379, helping over 29,000 households in the borough experiencing hardship due to an increase in the cost of living, with a further £3m recently allocated. 26,000 of the households were assisted through direct payments and over 3,000 through application-based crisis and discretionary emergency awards.
- Created automated, visual reporting from the new NEC Housing System to support business decisions.
- Redesigned Access Croydon, providing a safer environment for customers and staff as well as including housing presence.
- Commissioned the first statistically significant residents survey for many years and published the findings.

Outcome Two: Croydon is a place of opportunity for business, earning, and learning.

- Secured £18.5m Levelling-Up Funding for the Reconnecting Croydon Programme to kick-start the regeneration of our borough, with improvements to the look, feel, and safety of our town centre.
- Commissioned Town Centre economic analysis and new inward investment plan.
- Hosted Deputy Mayor of London Howard Dawber, who stated during a recent visit that Croydon is a 'high priority' for investment due to its 'enormous potential.'
- Hosted the Minister for Local Government who commended our positive achievements to date.
- Opened a new Creative Digital LAB with Start Up Croydon and a new Innovation Centre at LSBU.
- Secured £3.74m in UK Shared Prosperity Funds as part of the government's levelling up agenda to improve pride in place through enhancing local investment by March 2025.
- Delivered a successful year as London Borough of Culture, celebrating the borough's unique identity, diverse communities, and rich heritage, culture, and creativity.
- Signed an Economic Growth Charter with London Gatwick, recognising that in 2023 this partnership added £265 million to Croydon's economy, as well as supporting 3,600 local jobs.
- Secured £245k funding to digitally transform Croydon's archives and applied to the Arts Council for accreditation of Croydon Museum.
- Launched a Young Entrepreneurs Academy, providing support for young entrepreneurs aged 18-35 interested in starting their own business.
- Croydon Adult Learning and Training (CALAT) retained its 'good' rating after an Ofsted inspection found that the service has developed its courses to help a range of community members improve their skills.

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

- Provided much-needed early support to families with young children with additional needs through £27m in DfE Safety Valve funding as part of the development of Locality SEND support.
- Collaborated with our school community to produce the highest level of good or outstanding Ofsted-rated schools in Croydon for some considerable time.
- Launched the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the joint protocol with Housing to support care-experienced young people.
- Taken the lead on multi-agency working in relation to serious youth violence and the publication of the Thematic Review in February following the deaths of five young people in 2021.
- Since the beginning of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, 26 families have moved into Private Rented Sector housing (PRS) with help from the Council's Rent Deposit Scheme.
- Opened the first Family Hub, with two more due to open over the next two years, offering a wide range of support for children and families.
- More than 4,000 school-aged children and young people responded to our first health and well-being survey, following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcome Four: Croydon is a cleaner, safer, and healthier place, a borough we are proud to call home.

Streets and Environment

- Delivered Norbury and Thornton Heath 'blitz' clean-ups.
- Progressed procurement of new waste, recycling, and street cleaning strategy.
- Introduced a programme of Healthy School Streets.
- Refurbished five children's playgrounds as part of the Playground Investment programme.
- Partnered with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) to revive 32 courts across 14 parks.
- Delivered four new all-weather cricket pitches in partnership with English Cricket.
- Opened a new Gym at Monks Hill Sports Centre.
- Presented with the Green Flag Award for Wandle Park.
- Adopted a new Parking Policy.

Community Safety

- Developed a new Youth Safety Delivery Plan, which focuses on keeping young people safe.
- Progressed a three-year plan to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG).
- New PSPOs for Town Centre and Thornton Heath.
- Published the Youth Justice plan.
- Set up the Community Safety Engagement Board, a new forum to engage community and faith groups as well as statutory partners.
- Established a Responsible Retailers Agreement for shops selling knives.
- Received MOPAC funding to tackle ASB, robbery, VAWG, and serious violence in Croydon town centre.
- Supported the borough's Safer Neighbourhood Board to resume in-person meetings, allowing the community to hold the Police to account.
- Funded local voluntary sector agencies to deliver engagement and diversion work across hotspot areas, including Croydon Town Centre, Shrublands, New Addington, and Thornton Heath. This included work in Church Street where large numbers of young people were congregating and committing ASB, effectively engaging with young people and significantly reducing the risk of violence.
- Following any serious incident, the partnership works with trusted local community partners to support the ongoing investigation, provide community reassurance, and direct support for affected families and friends. During the last year, we have significantly streamlined how we respond to serious incidents, allowing for very rapid deployment of resources within 24 hours of an incident taking place to support the community. While we would prefer to never have to respond in this way, by being faster and working with already established partners, we can help mitigate the impacts of a critical incident and reduce the risk of any further violence.
- Set up a new taskforce group to make Croydon's town centre cleaner and safer for everyone.

Housing

- Secured £53.8 million of government housing grant through the GLA to deliver the new scheme for Regina Road residents, with construction of homes under way by summer 2026, in response to resident consultation with an 82% turnout.
- Restructured our Housing department to be more resident-focused, including the introduction of a Housing Strategy and various strategies to transform our housing service.
- Brought in three new repairs contractors, with the Repairs Contact Centre brought in-house, providing us with better oversight of calls and repair demands.
- Reviewed and co-designed the Voids lettable standard with residents.
- Compliance plan for Building Safety Act – All high-risk buildings were registered by the deadline with the Building Safety Regulator in October 2023.
- Administered the full grant allocation for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) of £1,241,242, which was used to support residents with mental health needs and covered rental costs for residents waiting for Personal Independence Payments.
- Established new links with Housing Associations with a view to discussing best practice to better serve our residents.
- Launched caretaking standards book, with close involvement of residents.

Planning and Town Centre Regeneration

- Reviewed the Local Plan to revitalize Croydon's planning system, listening to residents' feedback, and changing council policy to emphasize design and character over density in new development.
- Commissioned the new Town Centre Vision, Spatial Framework, and Regeneration Plan.
- Monthly meetings with Unibail-Rodamco-Westfield to discuss the Whitgift and Westfield developments and broader Town Centre Regeneration.
- Received a planning application for a new leisure centre on the Purley Pool site and regeneration of the surrounding area.
- Established the Urban Room in the Whitgift Centre and held engagement workshops on the town centre vision.
- Took action to prosecute traders for offenses related to the sale of vapes, underage alcohol, and knives.

Outcome Five: People can lead healthier and independent lives for longer.

- Delivered two LGA peer challenges for Adult Social Care and Public Health, with accompanying action plans.
- Developed a new Air Quality Action Plan, which is due to go out for consultation.
- Updated the Health and Wellbeing strategy and terms of reference for the Health and Wellbeing Board, with thousands consulted on how to improve Croydon's health and wellbeing.
- Retained our Dementia-friendly status and published our Dementia Strategy & Action Plan.
- Increased the quality of Adult Social Care from 81% in June 2022 to 89% good or outstanding in November 2023.
- Established a Resident Voice group to shape the trajectory of Adult Social Care services through lived experience.
- Maintained Adult Social Care Provider Services CQC rating as Good or Outstanding.
- Achieved DHSC substance misuse target of increasing numbers into treatment, forming one of two boroughs in London to have done this.

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.

In December 2023, an employment tribunal dismissed all the discrimination, constructive unfair dismissal, and wrongful dismissal claims by a former senior officer as they were not well-founded. In addition, we have passed documents to the Met Police, who are continuing their inquiries into the facts and evidence relating to the Council's financial position and historic governance failures. We were also planning to refer documents with relevant professional bodies but have held back to allow the Police to complete their initial inquiries. This is to ensure that disclosure of the relevant materials does not prejudice the work of the Police and any potential action that they may take. 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.

The Council's Relationship with the Improvement and Assurance Panel

During my second year as Mayor, my Cabinet, the Corporate Management Team, and I have continued to work closely with the Improvement and Assurance Panel (IAP) through open, collaborative, and constructive working relationships. It is important to remember that Croydon is the only local authority in distress that does not have commissioners. The Panel does hold powers of direction, which they have made very clear, they see as a measure of last resort. Crucially, the IAP has now set out its plan for leaving Croydon in July 2025 or sooner, highlighting its confidence that the Council is on a sustainable pathway of continuous improvement. The Exit Strategy highlights the strong focus on returning to financial stability in the Mayor's Business Plan and the Mayor's 'collaborative and transparent' approach, which has improved governance. Tony McArdle, chair of the IAP, says that the Council is at a 'critical point,' but he believes that the Council 'has the capacity and capability' to deliver the Exit Strategy.

In the latest report of the IAP, the chairman identified substantial progress in several areas, including financial mismanagement, governance, and improving council homes, while managing rising costs and demand for services such as caring for vulnerable children and adults. The panel specifically highlighted my commitment to fixing the finances and how I have 'demonstrated resolution in taking difficult decisions to bring this about.' In addition, this positive working relationship was noted by the Local Government Minister's visit on May 9th, showing confidence in Croydon's position and shared commitment to its further transformation. The Council continues to engage collaboratively with the IAP as it leads its own recovery from the mismanagement of the previous administration.

Priorities for 2024/25

Over the coming year, my Administration will continue to build upon the progress set out above to continue to deliver the Mayor's Business Plan and transform the Council. We will continue to deliver our new Transformation plan to be the most cost-effective and efficient Council in London.

- **Finances** - Balancing the Council's budget and negotiating a package of support from the Government to return Croydon to financial sustainability.
- **Housing** - Improving the Council's housing service and making significant progress with the housing transformation programme.
- **Town Centre** – Continue to work with partners to develop a new masterplan to regenerate the Town Centre and increase the meantime use of empty units.
- **Addressing Broken Windows Issues** – Improving the performance of graffiti removal team, 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** – Continuing to reform our planning policy and performance of the department.
- **Community Safety** – Continual implementation of the delivery plans that sit within the community safety strategy, relating to youth safety, tackling violence against women and girls and key hotspots across the borough.

Conclusion

This report presents just a snapshot of some of my Administration's achievements. In reality, it will take longer than one term to fix Croydon, because whilst it was easy for people to break this Council it is a much more challenging process to rebuild trust and confidence.

Over the last year, we have made great strides in restoring order, and now we are moving towards a new normal. I have a clear plan, have taken bold action and Croydon has a better future. We have come a long way in the last two years to bring meaningful change to Croydon. We still have a long journey ahead, but I am determined to not only restore pride in Croydon but also restore confidence in Croydon, so that we may build that brighter future together.