



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Catherine Frances
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**Ministry of Housing, Communities
& Local Government**
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Tony McArdle
By email

18 January 2021

Dear Tony

I am writing to thank you for agreeing to lead the new London Borough of Croydon Improvement and Assurance Panel. This letter formally confirms your appointment by the Secretary of State as Chair of the Panel and confirms the terms of reference that we have agreed for your work.

The establishment of an Improvement and Assurance Panel for Croydon was one of the main recommendations of Chris Wood's non-statutory review of the London Borough of Croydon which is due to be published on 1 February 2021. The intention to appoint the Panel will be announced to the Council in the 20 January Ministerial letter from Luke Hall MP to Cllr Hamida Ali, the Leader of the Council.

The purpose of this Panel is:

- To provide external advice, challenge and expertise to the London Borough of Croydon in developing and implementing their Improvement Plan; and
- To provide assurance to the Secretary of State of the London Borough of Croydon's progress in delivering this Plan.

The terms of reference we have agreed for your work are attached to this letter. They highlight that, as a first step in its role, the Panel will provide an initial assessment of the Improvement Plan incorporated into the Council's request for exceptional financial support (received 15 December 2020) by early February 2021. More generally and in the longer term, the Panel will provide advice and challenge to the Council on the full range of their improvement activities.

The Secretary of State will need regular assurance that the Council is working at pace to deliver the scale of change that is needed. As mentioned above, we have agreed that you will submit your first report to the Secretary of State by 5 February 2021. This will include your assessment of whether the Recovery Plan is sufficient to help the Council to meet its Best Value Duty. Following this, you will provide regular reports to the Secretary of State until the end of March 2024 when we hope that the work of the Board can conclude.

If you have any questions, please do get in touch at any time. Max Soule, Deputy Director for Local Government Stewardship, will be the lead official in my team for your work.

I am copying this letter to the Leader and Chief Executive of the London Borough of Croydon. It will also be published on gov.uk.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Frances', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

CATHERINE FRANCES

London Borough of Croydon Improvement and Assurance Panel

Terms of Reference

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has established the London Borough of Croydon Improvement and Assurance Panel (“the Panel”). The Panel will provide advice and challenge to the Council alongside assurance to the Secretary of State as the Council seeks to improve its strategic financial governance and budgetary control in response to the findings of Chris Woods non-statutory review.

Purpose

1. The purpose of the Panel is:
 - To provide external advice, challenge and expertise to the London Borough of Croydon in developing and implementing their Improvement Plan; and
 - To provide assurance to the Secretary of State of the London Borough of Croydon’s progress in delivering this Plan.

2. This will involve:
 - Providing regular advice and challenge to the Council on the full range of their improvement activities.
 - In the first instance, the Panel is asked to provide an initial assessment of the Improvement Plan incorporated into the Council’s EFS request (received 15 December 2020) by early February 2021.
 - The Panel will also work with the Council to develop a clear assessment of its current assets and, where appropriate, a disposal strategy.
 - More generally, the Panel will provide an assessment of on delivery against the milestones set out in the Council’s Improvement Plan which draws on the recommendations of the non-statutory report and reports from other reviews commissioned by the Council and which are identified as part of the Exceptional Financial Support that is being offered to the Council by central government.
 - Providing written commentaries on the Council’s progress to the Secretary of State each quarter, including recommending the use of Best Value powers (such as the appointment of Commissioners) if the Council fails to demonstrate progress. These commentaries will be published.

3. The Panel will convene for the first time in January 2021 and is expected to conclude by March 2024 unless circumstances mean that, on advice from the Panel, the Secretary of State decides to use his Best Value powers under the Local Government Act 1999.

4. Panel meetings will be held in private and any minutes produced will not be published.

5. Following on from the initial assessment of the Council's EFS request, and work on assets, the Panel's will work with MHCLG officials to plan a timetable for its reports linked to key milestones in the Council's improvement journey.

Membership

6. The Panel membership will comprise:
 - Independent Chair and governance lead – Tony McArdle, (ex-CEO of Lincolnshire CC and currently Lead Commissioner at Northamptonshire CC)
 - Independent external member (finance lead) – Margaret Lee (currently Executive Director, Corporate and Customer Services and previously CFO, Essex CC); and
 - Independent external member (commercial and asset disposal) – Phil Brookes (Crown Representative, worked on Nottingham rapid non-statutory review).
7. Membership of the Panel is not fixed: it will be assessed and adjusted as necessary as its role evolves in line with developments at the Council. At the same time, the Panel will seek to work closely with other advisers working with the Council in particular focussing on those providing support on Children's Services and Adult Social Care.

Costs

8. Any costs associated with the Panel will be met by the London Borough of Croydon.
9. Panel members will be paid a fee for their work. We would expect this to be in line with the fees paid to previous members of review teams or improvement panels of £600 - £800 per day plus reasonable expenses, including travel and subsistence. The fees will be paid on a personal basis.
10. Panel members will need to work flexibly as the demands of the role requires. However, the London Borough of Croydon may wish to agree in advance the number of days advice to be provided by each Board member over a 12-month period. For example, Birmingham City Council agreed their non-executive advisers would each provide 12 days/year; the Grenfell Recovery Taskforce were each appointed to work in Kensington and Chelsea for 2-3 days/week or maximum of 120 days/ year.