

# Story: Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission and the creation of Fair BnB

## A case study in community potential

Fair BnB grew out of the Croydon's Opportunity & Fairness Commission (OFC), a year-long look into how to improve Croydon for (and with) its residents. Research and engagement revealed a need for temporary homes, as well as assets in the form of over 4,000 spare bedrooms in the borough.

Strong insight from the OFC, through interviews and surveys with 3,000 residents, helped map the willingness of people to step up. The next step was to build a format which allowed citizen power to flourish.

The result was Fair BnB, a service designed to bring people on the verge of homelessness into the spare rooms of homeowners. Whether it's a person on their own or a single mum with a young family, guests can stay anywhere from a few days to eight weeks. Living with a homeowner, they have a better chance of getting back on their feet than they would in a hostel far away from their community, or their child's school. Hosts can provide friendship and advice for their guests, whilst making vital use of an otherwise empty space.

Fair BnB is now live and recruiting hosts. The council screens guests in advance to ensure a host's safety. They're paid between £15 and £25 a night depending on how big the spare room is. As a social enterprise, it will reinvest any profit it makes. The scheme will take less out of the council's temporary accommodation budget than the alternative of running a hostel place would.

There is a parallel between Fair BnB and Newham Council's 'Shared Lives' initiative, which brings an elderly or disabled person into the spare room of a homeowner who wants to be a carer part time. The council trains the carer, supports them and pays them a wage.

There is a co-produced element to Fair BnB, in that the idea was honed by dialogue with residents. The council's primary engagement role was as enabler, creating a structure through which residents could start to engage with council problems of their own accord.

For Croydon the benefits of this will be economic, with fewer council resources spent on paying for more expensive guesthouses or hostels. The benefits will also be social, with host families hopefully offering more emotional and practical support than private B&Bs might, stronger bonds forming between residents who wouldn't otherwise meet.

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This all came through the engagement carried out by Croydon OFC, which identified the capacity and appetite of local people to do more for themselves and others in the community. Robust engagement with local communities when the Commission was conducting research to inform its work fed directly into a policy idea with the potential to benefit all parties. It is a good example of how a dialogue with residents can save money and build social capital, through recognising communities' ability to step up.

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