



# Finance and Resources

## Cabinet Member Bulletin

### Councillor Simon Hall

#### December 2018

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## Richard Simpson

Richard has decided that he is leaving the Council in March. Richard has done a fantastic job over the 13 years he has been with the Council. He has decided that he wants a new challenge. He has built a really strong team and has led that team, which is responsible for managing our finances and providing our corporate services, through the challenging financial times we have seen over the last few years. I know I will have the opportunity to pay tribute to him publicly before he leaves but I wanted to take this bulletin to express my thanks for all he has done and say how much I have enjoyed working with him so closely over the last four years.

## Budget 2018

The Government's budget a few weeks ago contained some limited good news for the Council. We are getting an estimated £3,8m. of money for social care for 19/20 and an estimated £1m. for pothole repairs.

We are still awaiting the Government's local government finance settlement. However, assuming that this is in line with previous announcements, even with the extra money, we will see a significant cash reduction in government funding to the Council, at a time when inflation, population growth and demographic change means that we should be seeing an increase in government funding.

## Ethical Council Tax Collection

This month, I signed, on behalf of the Council, a commitment to fair and ethical council tax collection, and pledged to proactively offer help to those struggling with bill payments to prevent them getting further into debt.

Croydon is among the first local authorities in the country to sign the council tax protocol which has been developed by Citizens Advice (CAB) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

It is often the most vulnerable people in society who fall victim to debt, and it can be hard for them to break the cycle. Council tax arrears should be treated as a sign that an individual or family are struggling and need our help. By signing the council tax protocol and working closely with the CAB, we are committing to offering our residents that help, to take an ethical approach to debt collection and build on the excellent preventative work of our Gateway service, helping families break the cycle of debt and build their financial resilience.



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## Enforcement Agents

Many will be aware of the issues around enforcement agents (bailiffs) and the tragedy of a New Addington young man, Jerome Rogers, who committed suicide in 2016 after being pursued by bailiffs on behalf of another local authority.

We already have an in-house enforcement agent team that deals with many debts and acts in a highly ethical manner. I recently went out with a member of that team, to see for myself how they deal with different situations.

We have made the decision that we will be expanding the in-house team so that enforcement of in-borough debt across the Council will be undertaken by that team once it is expanded.

We are also in the process of going out to tender for external bailiffs (e.g. essentially for debts from individuals or companies outside of the borough) and will be imposing very strict criteria for ethical behaviour in the tender and having powers to terminate contracts where there are failures to act ethically.

## Assets being gifted to Pension Fund

As you know, the Council has a £1,2bn pension fund, which provides the pensions to Council employees, current and past, and to other employers with former council employees. The pension payment in relation to current employees will, of course, continue to the end of the century and beyond.

However, the Pension Fund is not yet fully funded, although the funding rate has improved substantially over the last few years.

The Council has an interest in some 350 properties, worth c. £100 million, which are held by a Limited Liability Partnership and rented out through a charity, Croydon Affordable Homes. The Council's interest is that, in 40 years, it will receive these properties free of all debt.

At a Pension Committee on 21 November, the Committee agreed to recommend to Council that the Pension Fund take the Council's interests in these properties.

The Council currently pays c.£13m. per annum as a deficit contribution into the Pension Fund. This is in addition to its regular employer contributions.

As a result of gifting the Council's interests in the properties, the Council's deficit contribution will be reduced, by an amount to be calculated by the actuaries to the Pension Fund, but currently thought to be in the order of £3m.



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## Colonnades

In accordance with our Asset Investment Strategy, approved at last Council, we have acquired the Colonnades retail and leisure park (off Purley Way, in Waddon ward). We are acquiring the property in two phases for some £53m.

Taken together with the earlier acquisition of the Croydon Park Hotel, these assets will contribute (after interest and other costs), in excess of £2m. per annum to protect frontline services.

## Local Digital Declaration

Working with our new Chief Digital Officer, Neil Williams, I have officially signed Croydon up to the Local Digital Declaration. This is a public declaration of our collective ambition for delivering improved council IT and digital services to better meet residents' needs. The principles will apply to all of our work and will help shape our ways of working for the better, as well as connecting us to the wider local government digital movement and potentially accessing grant funding from MHCLG for some of our digital projects.

## Good to Great ICT disaggregation programme

The Good to Great programme is about moving away from a big overarching contract and moving to a more services in-house and a series of focused separate contracts for different aspects of IT. The overall management and network architecture is now going to be with the Council.

We have now approved the contracts for EUS (Service Desk & End User Computing), Print, ITSM Tooling and Telephony.

Following the tender for Applications Management Services (AMS), the Council is now bringing this service back in house to become part of the ICT/Digital Team. This will give us greater control, oversight and management of our suite of software applications and their role in helping us improve resident services end to end.

Detailed transition planning (Phase III) is underway with our delivery partner Rainmaker, with the main move to new suppliers/ in-house during May 2019 for our technology services.



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## New Appointments in Digital

I am extremely pleased to announce that the new permanent Head of Digital Operations (the role has been renamed from 'Head of ICT') will be Dave Briggs. Dave is a well-known name in the local government digital, data and technology community and will be a huge asset for Croydon. He will start with us here in the New Year and will bring a wealth of knowledge and energy to the team.

We also have a new Digital Design Manager who will lead on putting residents' needs first in how we design and deliver our digital services. Annie Heath is currently working for Brighton and Hove County Council and will also join us very early in the New Year. She has fantastic reputation and a great base of relevant experience to bring to us here at Croydon.

## Don't Mess With Croydon App

As part of the Council's move to a more digitally enabled reporting line for residents there are now eight categories of issues that residents can report via the new Don't Mess With Croydon mobile app. These include flytipping, dead animal, dog fouling, drug related litter and overflowing litter bins.

Once a resident has logged this it will go straight into the council case management system and automatically pass through to back office systems for processing, without any intervention by Council staff. Reports made will therefore be submitted real-time to the contractor's system. This means the contractors can receive and deal with reports during non-office hours. A great step forward.

## Commissioning and Contract Management Week

Earlier this month, the Council had a Commissioning and Contract Management Week, to ensure that all relevant staff, both those in the Commissioning and Contract Management department and across the Council, had a shared vision of best practice and could see how to apply the Council's principles and values. It was a highly successful week, which is another step on the journey to further improve our commissioning and contract management.

## Governance Review

The first two meetings have been held of the Governance Review Panel, independently chaired by Dame Moira Gibbs. I attend these meetings, as the relevant Cabinet Member, although I am not a member of the Panel. The Panel is making good progress, in terms of how it will operate and some of the key areas and it will be meeting again before Christmas.



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## Workforce

This Council has fantastic staff, who deliver to residents and so many of whom really go the extra mile in their jobs. We are rightly proud of them and it was a pleasure to be at the Croydon Council Staff Awards this month, celebrating some of the outstanding staff we have.

We are committed to seeing our staff go from strength to strength, including running leadership programmes, so that our staff can develop. It is worthy of note that two recent director appointments were internal promotions.

This administration is committed to ensure that the Council, at all levels, is diverse and reflective of the communities it serves.

A huge amount of progress has been achieved over the last four years. but we recognise there is work still to do. That is why there is a focus on this, led by Jo Negrini, Chief Executive, and Sue Moorman, our HR Director – and, in due course, this will also inform a new Workforce Strategy. Cllr Ali and I look at the progress on this on a monthly basis.

## Trans Day of Remembrance

On November 20, there was the first official flag-raising at the Town Hall for the International Trans Day of Remembrance, where we remember those killed because of being trans. In the last year, there were over 369 such deaths (this is the figure for those countries that record such deaths, some do not and excludes suicides), including one in the UK.

The Deputy Mayor raised the flag (which I provided) and there were councillors, council staff and representatives of the Croydon trans community present.