



Finance and Resources

Cabinet Member Bulletin

Councillor Simon Hall

October 2019

Current Year Financial Performance

As reported to Cabinet in September, the forecast for the current year indicates that the Council is broadly in line with budget, prior to exceptional items.

Clearly, there are many key services to vulnerable residents where the Council is seeing significant demand pressures and significant service transformation and work on prevention and early help so as to improve the lives of residents and limit the cost impact to the Council.

The Council is forecasting an exceptional item for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Appeals Right Exhausted in excess of £9 million. Repeated refusals by the Home Office to recognise the inequity of the situation and the burden on Croydon council tax payers is truly shocking. Cross-party lobbying continues on this but the Home Office and the Treasury are turning deaf ears.

Commissioning Framework

The new Tender and Contract Regulations, Social Value and Commissioning Framework were adopted at full Council in July 2019.

The Tender and Contract Regulations reflects the Council's commitment to support its local businesses and to keep the £ within Croydon. The new Buying Team focuses on spend from £10k to £100K with spend in this area circa £100 million per annum. The new team will ensure that at least two local companies are invited to quote wherever possible. A programme of business engagement events for local Micro and SME businesses will support this. We are already seeing the benefit in terms of increased use of local businesses and cost savings.

The revised Commissioning Framework encompasses an overarching commitment to 'Ethical and Sustainable Commissioning' that maximises on social value, fosters local employment, promotes fair pay, encourages local business growth and supports community priorities.

The Council for the first time published its Social Value Policy and is one of the first to do so. This policy clearly defines social value and its importance to the Borough and includes a change in the Council's procurement rules. Social Value will now contribute to a minimum of 10% of the quality evaluation assessment for all relevant procurements.

These important changes shows the continued focus on ethical and sustainable commissioning in support of residents and Croydon's businesses.

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Croydon Digital Strategy

Three months since publishing the digital strategy, now close to completing the setup of CDS with new governance, new capability in user centred design, agile delivery, and reshaping the team into multidisciplinary delivery teams, so it is ready to deliver on the commitments in the strategy. This blog post gives a really useful insight into the changes <https://croydon.digital/2019/09/04/introducing-multidisciplinary-teams-at-the-croydon-digital-service/>

Council staff are enjoying a radically better service than in previous years for their core ICT support. Performance and user satisfaction for our new ICT partner, Littlefish, continues to be excellent, with a peak in August of a Net Promoter Score of 70.77, rated as “world class”.

Redevelopment of the council’s website, to replace it with one that is designed around meeting residents’ needs more effectively, is now underway. We are currently testing the new content and designs for all of the Adult Social Care content on the site, with actual users of those services, to validate that the new site is an improvement. From mid-October we expect to begin putting new pages live and redirecting old pages to the new pages – and the new site will replace the old site incrementally as the project progresses.

CDS supported the go-live of the new Selsdon library with tablets and computers for staff, library users and children, networking, telephony, printers and secure access to applications used in the library. This was a huge undertaking and delivered on time.

We continue to progress improvements to internal technology, including the People Systems Programme, moving applications to the cloud for improve performance and resilience, and refreshing the council’s telephony systems including improvements to the system used by the contact centre, which will enable significant improvement for residents. Improvements have gone live to the complaints system, FOI and SAR management systems.

We have won £20k in grant funding from the LGA for work on digital inclusion

A few progress reports to highlight on the Croydon Digital blog:

- [We are collaborating with 4 councils on user research to improve digital services](https://croydon.digital/2019/08/30/croydon-teams-up-with-4-other-councils-on-user-research/)
<https://croydon.digital/2019/08/30/croydon-teams-up-with-4-other-councils-on-user-research/>
- [We have written up the improvements we made to the SEND local Offer site](https://croydon.digital/2019/09/13/making-information-easier-to-find-for-families-of-children-with-send/)
<https://croydon.digital/2019/09/13/making-information-easier-to-find-for-families-of-children-with-send/>

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- [We solved a problem in a week, using Google's Design Sprint methodology](https://croydon.digital/2019/07/24/one-week-to-solve-a-problem-cds-first-digital-design-sprint/)
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Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2019

As I reported at last Council. The draft accounts were completed on time, by 31 May. The audit was completed by the 31 July deadline. These deadlines are incredibly tight and I want to thank Lisa Taylor, Ian Geary and all the Finance function for their professionalism and dedication, which enabled this to happen.

Asset investment strategy

The asset investment strategy approved last year continues to deliver. We have recently completed on Phase 2 of the Colonnades. The Colonnades will generate some £1.4m (after interest costs) for frontline services.

We are actively looking for appropriate assets and that is why Cabinet is recommending to Council that the fund be increased from £100m to £200m.

Recruitment – Early Help & Social Care Division

The Recruitment Team have processed 101 new starters since April 2019 to October 2019 for the Early Help and Children Social Care Division.

From the 101 new starters, 71 of these are Qualified Social Workers, which also includes 18 in management roles, and 30 are other professionally qualified staff working to support Social Care Teams.

This recruitment is making a significant contribution to the improvement journey.

Workforce Strategy

The first draft of the workforce strategy has been developed with input from staff across the council. The strategy sets out our key priorities over the next few years to become a high performing organisation. It also defines our success factors and what it will take from the workforce to fulfilling our vision of becoming a high performing organisation that is collaborative, inclusive and innovative, that allows talent to flourish and builds our workforce capability to meet our ambitions and reflect our community - where everyone can speak up, speak out and have a voice in the future direction of the organisation - where fairness and justice feel real, and where bullying, harassment and discrimination are not tolerated.

The workforce strategy will sit alongside the corporate plan, community strategy and service delivery plans and the medium and long term financial planning cycle which will enable us to be fit for and to be the right kind of organisation to deliver the best outcomes for our residents. It is intended to go to Cabinet on the 18th of November

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Equalities – Disclosure

Non-disclosure campaign was run during June with both intranet presence and push e-mails to Directors to encourage disclosure. A reminder of importance and endorsement from staff networks and unions was prepared and communicated.

An Updated report on staff profile is being prepared and should be available in October.

Pension Scheme Communications

Annual Benefit Statements made available to over 16000 members of the pension scheme by the deadline of 31 August.

Data Sharing and Schools

Our legal services division has drafted a comprehensive Information Sharing Agreement between the Council and all schools in the borough to strengthen information sharing arrangements in relation to children's information. It protects pupils and ensures the sharing is GDPR compliant.

Insourcing

This administration is committed to insourcing, as a preferred route, i.e. there need to be reasons to not insource. This is an ongoing process and will continue as services are reviewed and contracts come up for renewal.

Earlier this year, we insourced the grounds maintenance service and we have seen considerable improvement in the service since then. In addition, the third of staff who were not paid the London Living Wage by the previous contractor, are, of course, paid the London Living Wage.

Also, as part of the new ICT arrangements, significant services have been brought in-house, notably application management. Again, and as detailed elsewhere in this bulletin, this is showing real benefits.

In September, we brought a further part of our Special Education Needs Transport in-house. Again, this has happened seamlessly and we are delivering an excellent service.

At the end of this year, we will be bringing back in-house the operations of our special sheltered accommodation, thus providing improved services for vulnerable frail residents and ensuring the staff delivering those services are paid the London Living Wage and are given opportunities to flourish.

I look forward to providing details of services insourced at future meetings.

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