



Finance and Treasury

Cabinet Member Bulletin

Councillor Simon Hall

November 2017

Funding for Children Services' improvement

Some £3 million has been allocated to fund improvement initiatives within Children Services following the Ofsted review. These are a mixture of short term interventions and measures to ensure that a sustainable good service will be achieved.

I chair a Children Improvement Finance Group that considers requests and allocates funding to initiatives. This group, which includes Cllr Flemming, Richard Simpson and Barbara Peacock, ensures that there is strong governance for such expenditure.

Areas that have been allocated to include:

- Additional social work teams, to allow case loads to be brought down
- Additional management resource, to improve the level of supervision
- Increased legal support, notably to deal with the increased number of care proceedings
- Increased level of business support, to allow social workers to focus more on children
- Increased levels of advocacy, return home interviews and independent visits
- Investment in workforce recruitment and retention
- Programme Management resource
- Expert advice on key areas

This expenditure is being funded from transformation and so does not give rise to an in-year revenue pressure.

The implications of the level of activity in Children Services and the possible new service models are being factored into the budget planning for 18/19.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

The Leader and I, along with officers, met Brandon Lewis, the Immigration Minister recently to discuss the issues around Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC).

The Minister was very complimentary about the work that Croydon was doing and the difference we were making to the lives of UASC.

We raised the issue of the funding arrangements for UASC and other costs associated with Croydon being a gateway authority. We were able to make a series of specific requests.

The Minister clearly heard our arguments and promised that he would get his civil servants to look into the issues in detail, with a view to achieving a proper solution that is fair to Croydon council tax payers, both in terms of direct costs for UASC and other related costs, such as those associated with the Home Office not enacted two year old legislation.



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Greenwich Leisure awarded leisure contract

After a very robust procurement process, Greenwich Leisure Limited ('GLL') has been awarded a concession to run the Council's leisure operations for up to 20 years.

The way this has been done will allow:

- Considerable financial benefits (over £1million per year once fully up and running)
- A vastly improved service which will therefore benefit more of our residents, including more outreach, use of our parks, more targeting of key groups and more work with communities
- Full implementation of the London Living Wage

This is the latest example of the totally different approach that this administration takes to commissioning and procurement and the benefits that this brings, in terms of finances, the service delivered to residents and how those delivering the services are treated.

IT Procurement Strategy

The arrangements with Capita, whilst providing a step improvement from previous arrangements, have not delivered the benefits and services hoped for. These arrangements also do not give us the flexibility we need or allow us to realise the full business benefits of technology.

Cabinet in November endorsed a new strategy, which moves away from the all encompassing single contract, but a different model, with elements being brought in-house and the other services being divided into lots, giving more scope for local procurement.

As with other areas where we have taken this approach, such as Facilities Management, we believe this will give us a better more flexible service at lower costs.

Business Rates Relief

We have now been able to double the reliefs being automatically applied to businesses, as compared to the scheme announced in July, as a way of limiting the adverse impact of the massive increases in rateable values that the government imposed earlier this year.

Help for care leavers

We have listened to the representations from the Children's Society and others, to exempt care leavers in the borough from council tax from 18/19.

I am proud that the scheme we are bringing in is the most generous of any local authority that has brought this in.