

EXECUTIVE, RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 6.30 pm on 18 November 2020

Present:

Councillor Simon Fawthrop (Chairman)
Councillor Christopher Marlow (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Gareth Allatt, Julian Benington,
Nicholas Bennett MA J.P., David Cartwright QFSM,
Mary Cooke, Ian Dunn, Nicky Dykes, Robert Evans,
Russell Mellor, Michael Rutherford, Michael Tickner,
Stephen Wells and Angela Wilkins

Also Present:

Councillor Graham Arthur, Portfolio Holder for Resources,
Commissioning and Contracts Management
Councillor Aisha Cuthbert, Executive Assistant to the
Leader of the Council
Councillor Kira Gabbert, Executive Assistant to the
Resources, Commissioning and Contracts Management
Portfolio
Councillor Colin Smith, Leader of the Council

56 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Councillor Harmer and Councillor Bennett attended as substitute.

Apologies for lateness were received from Cllr Dykes.

57 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Simon Fawthrop declared an interest as an employee of British Telecom (BT) and left the room during consideration of Item 9 (Minute 64) – BT/ICT Contract Monitoring Report - and Item 10 (Minute 63(10)) on the Leader's decisions agenda -Replacement Financial System. Councillor Marlow took the Chair for the duration of these items.

In respect of Items 10 and 15 on the Leader's decision agenda, Councillor Rutherford declared an interest as his employer was a systems integrator for Oracle Cloud which was one of the official partners. Councillor Rutherford stated that he did not think that Bromley Council would be using them as part of the ERP.

**58 QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS AND MEMBERS OF THE
PUBLIC ATTENDING THE MEETING**

No questions had been received.

**59 MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE, RESOURCES AND
CONTRACTS PDS COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 8
OCTOBER 2020 AND 22 OCTOBER 2020 (EXCLUDING
EXEMPT ITEMS)**

The minutes (excluding exempt information) of the Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS meeting held on 8th October 2020, and the Special Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS meeting held on 22nd October 2020, were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**60 MATTERS OUTSTANDING AND WORK PROGRAMME
Report CSD20118**

The report dealt with the Committee's business management including matters outstanding from previous meetings and the proposed work plan for the remainder of the year.

The Vice-Chairman noted that at the last meeting it had been agreed that Officers should write to all schools regarding Section 106 funding. It was agreed that this should be added to the Matters Outstanding Report.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and updated as outlined above.

61 FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS

The Committee noted the Forward Plan of Key Decisions covering the period October 2020 to January 2021.

**62 RESOURCES, COMMISSIONING AND CONTRACTS
MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO - PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY**

The Committee considered the following reports where the Resources, Contracts and Commissioning Portfolio Holder was recommended to take a decision.

**a INSURANCE FUND ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20
Report FSD20077**

The report advised Members of the position of the Insurance Fund as at 31st March 2020 and presented statistics relating to insurance claims for the last two years. In 2019/20, the total Fund value increased from £3.984m to

£4.396m. A mid-year review of the Fund had also been carried out and it was estimated that the final Fund value as at 31st March 2021 would increase to approximately £4.6m. The Committee noted that the position would continue to be monitored throughout the year.

In response to a question from the Chairman concerning whether the value of the insurance fund was too high, the Insurance and Risk Manager explained that currently insurance claims were unpredictable and there was potential for significant claims to be received. Consequently, in the current climate it was prudent to maintain the value and undertake a review at the end of the next financial year.

The Committee noted that at this point in time it was not possible to identify any significant trends in relation to the impact of the Covid pandemic. Personal injury claims could be submitted up to three years after the incident and therefore it was a little too early to analyse the impact. Generally the bulk of claims made to local authorities were public liability and highways claims and as yet there had not been a significant reduction in the number of claims received, although there had been a slight increase in the number of cycling claims due to issues with highways and potholes.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to note the report.

**b TREASURY MANAGEMENT - QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE
2020/21 & MID-YEAR REVIEW
Report FSD20086**

The report summarised treasury management activity during the second quarter of 2020/21 and included a Mid-Year Review of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy. The report ensured that the Council was implementing best practice in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice for Treasury Management. Investments as at 30th September 2020 totalled £373.3m and there was no outstanding external borrowing. For information and comparison, the balance of investments stood at £366.7m as at 30th June 2020, £336.1m as at 31st March 2020, and, at the time of writing the report (4th November 2020) it stood at £390.4m.

The Committee noted that there had been no investment exposure to the London Borough of Croydon. The Director of Finance confirmed that the Council could be reasonably confident in lending to other local authorities and background checks were always undertaken prior to lending.

RESOLVED: That the Portfolio Holder be recommended to

(a) note the Treasury Management performance for the second quarter of 2020/21;

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- (b) recommend that Council approve the 2020/21 prudential indicators as set out in Annex B1.**

63 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF REPORTS DUE FOR DECISION BY THE LEADER

The Committee considered the following reports on the Part 1 agenda which were due for consideration by the Leader on or after 25th November 2020:

**(1) BUDGET MONITORING 2020/21
Report FSD20058**

The report provided firstly, the second budget monitoring position for 2020/21 based on expenditure and activity levels up to the end of September 2020, excluding the financial impact of Covid-19. The report also highlighted any significant variations which would impact on future years as well as any early warnings that could impact on the final year end position. Secondly, the report identified latest indications of the financial impact of the Covid-19 situation which needed to be treated with some caution at this stage because of the ongoing uncertainty arising from moving out of lockdown to transition and ultimately the 'new normal'.

The Director of Finance introduced the report explaining that in terms of departmental budgets there were cost pressures but also underspends in the contingency so overall as far as 'business as usual' there was an underspend. In terms of Covid-19, significant resources had come from Government but there were also pressures and burdens associated with Covid-19 and it was important that residents and businesses were supported. This resulted in a shortfall in funding of £2m this year and a further £9m relating to Council Tax/Business Rate collection. The Committee noted that these were broad estimates that needed to be treated with caution, however was clear that there were pressures arising from the uncertainty around how long the second wave would continue and what would be the overall impact. In terms of managing the pressures, Members noted that Bromley was in a better position than some other local authorities. Finally, in terms of the full year effect, the issues outlined in the report would need to be addressed as part of the 2021/22 budget which would be presented to the Committee's meeting in January.

In response to a question the Director of Finance confirmed that the Council found itself in quite a strong position in relation to investment income and Treasury Management as a result of a number of two-year investments that had been made. The Director of Finance confirmed that he was not expecting a reduction in the budget next year as a result of the benefit of the higher rates of investment prior to the changes in the market. There would be an impact in relation to investment properties not just as a result of the Covid situation but also resulting from the 'new normal' and the impact on property investment income.

The Committee noted that compared to some other local authorities the Council found itself in a relatively good position in terms of the key tests.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to

- (a) consider the latest financial position;**
- (b) note that a projected net overspend on services of £1,538k is forecast based on information as at September 2020.**
- (c) consider the comments from Chief Officers detailed in Appendix 2;**
- (d) note a projected reduction to the General Fund balance of £83k as detailed in section 3.3 of the report;**
- (e) note the full year cost pressures of £6.4m as detailed in section 3.4 of the report;**
- (f) agree to the release of £200k from the 2020/21 Central Contingency relating to Staff Merit Awards as detailed in para. 3.2.2 of the report;**
- (g) agree to the release of £125k from the 2020/21 Central Contingency relating to TFM Posts as detailed in para. 3.2.3 of the report;**
- (h) agree to the release of £52k from the 2020/21 Central Contingency relating to PrEP Grant as detailed in para. 3.2.4 of the report;**
- (i) agree the release of £520k from earmarked reserves to fund community equipment as detailed in para. 3.9.1 of the report;**
- (j) identify any issues that should be referred to individual Portfolio Holders for further action.**

Estimated Financial Impact of Covid-19

- (k) consider the latest estimated financial impact of Covid-19 situation, detailed in Section 4, and note the ongoing financial uncertainty position relating to net costs and the current shortfall in Government funding; and**
- (l) note that the estimated financial impact of the Covid-19 situation which needs to be treated with some caution at this stage because of the ongoing uncertainty arising from the impact moving out of 'lockdown' to transition and ultimately the 'new normal'.**

**(2) CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2ND QUARTER 2020/21
Report FSD20089**

The report summarised the current position on capital expenditure and receipts following the 2nd quarter of 2020/21 seeking the Leader's approval to a revised Capital Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to

- (a) Note the report, including a total re-phasing of £1,817k from 2020/21 into future years, and agree a revised Capital Programme;**
- (b) Approve the following amendments to the Capital Programme:**
 - (i) Increase of £174k to the Capital Maintenance Budget;**
 - (ii) Increase of £175k to fund the purchase of a new Property Management System;**
 - (iii) Increase of £41k in relation to the Emergency Travel Fund;**
 - (iv) Reduction of £623k due to the loss of TfL grant funding; and**
 - (v) Reduction of £57k to the Devolved Formula Capital budget.**

**(3) COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT/REDUCTION SCHEME 2021/22
Report FSD20081**

The report advised Members of the result of the public consultation exercise and seek approval for the scheme to be forward to Full Council.

A Member noted that the consultation had only included one option, suggesting that in future it may be sensible to include multiple options.

In respect of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Protocol around not taking action against individuals in debt, it was agreed that information on this issue would be included in the next monitoring report. The Director of Finance confirmed that such cases were managed sympathetically by the Council. The Director of Finance also confirmed that the Hardship Fund had been included in the 2021/22 base budget.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to

- (a) consider the updated Impact Assessment at Appendix 1.**

- (b) consider the responses to the public consultation exercise at Appendix 2 and 3 of the report.**
- (c) consider whether the Council Tax Support\Reduction scheme for 2021/22 retains the calculation of entitlement for working-age claimants on 75% of the households Council Tax liability. Thereby the maximum assistance provided to a claimant of working-age is 75% of his/her Council Tax liability.**
- (d) Subject to the outcome of (a) to (c) above, recommend to Council the Council Tax Support\Reduction scheme for 2021/22.**

(4) BROMLEY THE BETTER BOROUGH

Bromley Council its partners had been working together to deliver its corporate plan 'Building a Better Bromley' (BBB). Much had been achieved by maintaining focus and harnessing our collective resources. The report presented a refreshed plan, building on achievements. The Council and its partners were committed to taking the next steps in making 'Bromley the better borough'. The ambitions outlined in the aspirational plan would be delivered through a wide range of strategic and operational plans across the Council and partner agencies.

Following a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed that further work should be undertaken, and Members should be encouraged to track change a MS Word version of the document which would be circulated following the meeting. This would enable Officers to gather Member input and reflect upon and respond to the feedback provided. The revised document could then be presented to the meeting of the Committee scheduled for January 2021.

RESOLVED: that a revised draft of "Bromley the Better Borough" be presented to Members in January 2021.

(5) REVIEW OF LEGAL SERVICES CHILDREN AND ADULTS TEAM Report CSD20121

The report set out a review of the services provided by the Children and Adults legal team, the budget for the service, the demand for the service and the resourcing requirement going forward.

In opening the discussion, the Chairman highlighted that this represented a growth item.

Members noted that as a result of the increased demand within the Children and Adults Legal Team there had been a need to use the services of additional locum lawyers and this had resulted in an overspend within the service. It was clear that there was an upward and sustained trend in the

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volume of children's social work and consequently the report was seeking authority for additional staff to join the in-house team to meet that demand. In response to a question the Director of Finance explained that a view needed to be taken on the extent to which the Council was able to meet its statutory obligations. Sufficient funding was available within central contingency and there was an element of urgency in ensuring the service was adequately resourced to meet the level of demand. Members noted that there was a significant risk to the Council, both financially and reputationally, if the Council found itself in a position whereby it was unable to provide adequate child protection and safeguarding arrangements.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to

(a) Agree to the creation of 2 FTE permanent lawyer posts to support childcare work (£63k) and adult social care (£85k).

(b) Agree funding of £35k to fund a 0.5 FTE Education lawyer post.

(c) Increase the Legal revenue budget from April 2021 by £183k to fund these additional legal posts.

(d) Drawdown from Central Contingency in 2020/21 a sum of £61k to fund the part year cost of these posts from 01 December 2020.

(e) To include a sum of £170k held in Central Contingency for potential locum costs for additional childcare and adults social care legal support, to be drawn down when required by the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contract Management.

**(6) COVID 19: PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS
Report CSD20062**

On April 24 2020, the Leader granted delegated authority to Chief Officers (in Agreement with the Portfolio Holder as required), for a period of six months, to take suitable alternative procurement action to manage contracts in response to disruption caused by the current and ongoing Covid 19 Public Health measures. During this period, a number of such actions were taken as appropriate. The ongoing Covid 19 pandemic and associated Public Health measures continued to cause disruption, capacity and sustainability issues for Council staff, providers and the wider provider market. There was a continued risk that this may adversely affect the Council's ability to undertake successful procurement processes for current or new contracts where a suitably compliant tender process would normally be required.

The report sought further authorisation from Executive, through the Leader, for delegated authority to Chief Officers to take appropriate procurement action, primarily variations to contracts as required, within the flexibilities

available through the Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contract Regulations 2015, to manage Council contracts effectively. Delegated authority was sought for a further period of six months. As the senior Executive member, the Leader could take all Executive decisions personally, subject to pre-decision scrutiny under the present temporary arrangements agreed by the Urgency Committee and Executive. Whereas the contract standing orders (CPR's) were matters reserved to full Council, it was permissible for the Leader to vary Executive side delegations and suspend aspects of the rules as proposed in the report.

Noting that it had been agreed to undertake a review of the emergency decision making arrangements implemented by the Council's Urgency Committee as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chairman suggested that there should be agreement to extend the current procurement arrangements for up to six months dependant on the outcome of the review of current decision making arrangements in January 2021.

A number of Members expressed concerns around the lack of scrutiny in relation to procurement decisions. It was stressed that as far as possible all decisions should be scrutinised prior to a decision being taken. The Assistant Director for Governance and Contracts agreed to liaise with Portfolio Holders and Chief Officers to ensure better engagement with PDS Committees around procurement decisions.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to:

- a) **Grant delegated authority to Chief Officers to take appropriate procurement action (as set out in paragraphs 3.14 to 3.19) as required to effectively manage contracts during the period of disruption caused by the current and ongoing Public Health measures;**
- b) **Agree that the delegated authority to Chief Officers to take appropriate procurement action is subject to Agreement with the Assistant Director Governance & Contracts, the Director of Corporate Services, the Director of Finance and the relevant Portfolio Holder where otherwise a procurement action would normally require a formal decision from the Portfolio Holder or Executive;**
- c) **Agree that the delegated authority to Chief Officers to take appropriate procurement action is in place for period of up to six months from 1 December 2020 following which it may be extended for a further period at the discretion of Executive or through the Leader subject to the review of decision making arrangements due to be conducted at the end of the year.**

(Councillor Wilkins and Dunn requested that their vote against the proposals be recorded)

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**(10) FORMAL CONSULTATION ON OUTLINE SERVICE PROPOSALS
AND PROCUREMENT STRATEGY OF A REPLACEMENT FINANCIAL
SYSTEM (PART 1)
Report FSD20087**

The Chairman, having declared an interest, left the meeting for the duration of this item. Cllr Christopher Marlow, as Vice-Chairman, chaired the meeting during the Chairman's absence.

As part of the IT Transformation programme, it had been recommended that reviews of Line of Business systems are undertaken to ensure they were supportable, fit for purpose and future proofed. Bromley had been using Oracle software for its main financial system since 1998. It was last upgraded to the current version in 2013 and was still hosted in the Council's data centre. The system was used by approximately 600 staff across the Council and by Liberata. The Council also had separate budget monitoring systems that were developed in-house in 2009/10 and presented a risk if compatibility issues arose from future changes required by various corporate Microsoft products, as well as being at risk from a loss of support. Following an options appraisal, it was now proposed to procure Oracle Cloud ERP system for Finance functions to ensure the Council had a fit for purpose system that would meet the current and future needs of the Council.

Opening the discussion, the Vice-Chairman welcomed the move away from a series of stand-alone applications to an ERP noting that a cloud-based system would be more secure. In response to a question concerning the decision to not consider alternate providers through a tender process, the Head of Finance (Adult Social Care) explained that a combination of factors had led to the recommendation. Firstly, a like-for-like comparison of the cost offered by Oracle with the current system resulted in a saving, if further functionality was added at a later time further savings would be realised. In addition, moving to a cloud-based system would give additional benefits and resilience with robust disaster recovery. Secondly, a number of issues had arisen that had hastened a review of the system, such as the coding structure and separation of Pension Fund transactions, both of which were raised by external audit, and more recent issues following the Windows 10 deployment, such as the reporting tool no longer being supported. It was therefore felt that there would be clear benefits to resolving those issues as soon as possible. A tender process could take considerable time and the risks of further delay would outweigh the benefits of the tender exercise.

Members noted that the whilst an ambitious timetable for implementation was being proposed, Officers were confident that the system could be delivered within the proposed timeframe.

In response to a question concerning whether it would be possible to provide a cost comparison with other local authorities who had undertaken tender

processes and awarded the contract to Oracle, the Head of Finance reported that this would be difficult as it would not be a like-for-like comparison due to the different software licensing arrangements in place, some of which would be based on the number of users of different elements of the system.

A Member expressed concern that the usual procurement processes were not being used. In response, the Legal Advisor to the Committee explained that the current contract with BT permitted modification of the contract and such a modification was allowed under Regulation 72 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The Director of Finance also highlighted that Value for Money was being sought through the process and as the Council had a history with Oracle some degree of loyalty recognition was expected; if at any time Officers felt that value for money was not being achieved a further report would be provided to Members.

RESOLVED: That the Leader be recommended to

- (a) consider the contents of the report;**
- (b) agree a variation to the BT contract to include the procurement of Oracle's Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning system for Finance and Procurement functions for a period of 5 years with the option to extend this for up to a further five years on an annual renewal basis;**
- (c) delegate authority to the Director of Finance to agree the annual renewal of the Oracle Cloud Enterprise Resource System after year 5 in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contracts Management;**
- (d) note that the capital scheme budget will be reduced by £200k to reflect the current projected costs of implementing the system;**
- (e) note that a report will be presented to Members for approval of a replacement HR/Payroll system during 2021.**

**64 BT/ICT CONTRACT MONITORING
Report CSD16105**

The Chairman, having declared an interest, left the meeting prior to the start of this item. Cllr Christopher Marlow, as Vice-Chairman, chaired the meeting during the Chairman's absence.

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The Committee received the fifth performance report of the British Telecom (BT) ICT contract utilising the Pan London Framework covering the period 1st September 2019 to 31st August 2020. Ian Rodgers and Ian Withycombe from BT attended the meeting to respond to questions.

The Chairman opened the discussion by thanking colleagues within BT and the Council ICT Team for their response to the challenges that Covid-19 had imposed on the operations of the Council. The Committee recognised that the almost overnight move to in excess of 85% of staff working from home had required significant operational changes which had been delivered very smoothly with minimal impact on service delivery.

In respect of KPIs, the Assistant Director for IT reported that on 25th March 2020, the Westminster Pan Framework imposed a freeze on the KPIs and SLAs for the frameworks. Discussions were taking place with the framework owners to agree when the freeze could be lifted, and Officers were anticipating that this would take place at the start of the New Year.

In response to a question surrounding the drop in performance in July and August, some months after the on-set of working from home, the Committee heard that beyond the onset of the Covid pandemic the Team had also been supporting the IT Transformation start up. This had resulted in a number of calls to the IT Help Desk which mainly centred around training issues. It was noted that now staff were working remotely some of the benefits of the sharing of knowledge that would occur in the office environment had been lost and as a result more calls were being made to the IT Help Desk. In response to this more Help Desk staff had been recruited and an improvement in performance was anticipated. The Assistant Director for IT confirmed that work had been undertaken with the Council's Learning and Development Team to provide more training for staff.

The Committee noted that at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic BT had been asked to prioritise calls made by colleagues in Public Health and those providing the emergency response. Staff had also been reassigned to support the setup of the Covid Response Team and this had inevitably had an impact on performance in relation to other service areas. In addition to the challenges around the Covid response in May 2020, the Windows 10 Project had been restarted and this had further impacted on performance.

Members noted that limits on the size of email attachments had been imposed in order to protect the system from cyber-attack and the limits imposed could be reviewed.

Turning to the issue of Members' IT, the Committee noted the proposals to start a project to review Member IT requirements in 2021 (in advance of the next Local Government elections). The Vice-Chairman proposed an additional recommendation that any future plans for Member IT would need to be within the existing budget. It was also suggested that a time limited Task

and Finish Group should be established to contribute to the review of Member IT requirements.

RESOLVED: That

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. Any future recommendations regarding the provision of Member IT will need to be within the existing budget; and**
- 3. A time limited Member IT Working Group be established.**

**65 SCRUTINY OF THE RESOURCES, COMMISSIONING &
CONTRACT MANAGEMENT PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

The Portfolio Holder for Resources, Commissioning and Contracts Management, Councillor Graham Arthur, attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Committee. Councillor Arthur gave a brief introduction highlighting the following issues:

- Preparations were beginning for a new way of working
- The pandemic had brought with it several advantages, not least an enforced move to flexible working.
- The almost overnight move to 85% of staff working from home whilst preserving all essential services would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.
- This had only been achievable due to the combination of flexible staff with a 'can do' attitude and the IT capacity to ensure state of the art technology available to support them.
- Bromley had played host to its first digital day conference. This had brought together eminent speakers and an agenda including the latest digital and A.I. technology. The innovations talked about at the conference were now informing the transformation programme and would directly influence the way of working going forward.
- The relationship with B.T. had been key and the Council had once again been short listed for a national partnership award.
- 1550 new IT kits have been rolled out from a Covid secure Civic Centre.
- Necessary to pay tribute to the outstanding contribution which had been made by the Facilities and Support Services Manager, The Assistant Director of Customer Services, and their teams. Facilities Services had delivered a Covid safe environment for staff whilst Customer Services had built on that to ensure that all possible services could be delivered.
- Similarly, the Learning and Development Team had shown extraordinary innovation in the way contact with staff had been maintained and all manner of training aids made available to stimulate and improve working. The Executive Assistant for Resources,

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Commissioning and Contracts Management would be liaising with HR staff to prepare a full report on the ongoing Health and Wellbeing Work including tackling the impact of isolation. This would be brought to the Committee in the new year.

- Working from home was likely to have a significant impact on the deployment of resource. In February the Council had a clear idea of investment plans for office requirements. This was based on a 70% desk occupancy, allowing for a set number of site visitors, and with a budget of £20m. Work was now underway to model what revised requirements will be and it was likely that there would be significant change.
- The Property Team were conducting an in-depth study of the Council estate to determine just what could be released for disposal. This would cover the operational estate as well as investment properties.
- The process of disengaging from both Amey and their sub-contractor Cushman and Wakefield was underway. Those staff to be TUPE'd had been identified and key contracts such as cleaning had been put out to tender. Moving forward, work was underway to establish the central property services department, with recruitment to two new posts complete resulting in a more efficient way of handling property matters. The Council was drawing on the experience of others, including Edinburgh, who had managed the transformation to in house dependency.
- The Portfolio Holder believed that if the Council harnessed the opportunities presented a much better way of working would evolve.
- The Director of Finance had provided a concise and accurate summary of the financial position.
- The importance of learning from other Councils was highlighted. Often more could be learnt from those who got it wrong than those who got it right. A forensic examination of what had led to Croydon's issuing of a 114 Statement, provided a graphic account of failure, with 23 recommendations to safeguard the operation of a council. Having reviewed the recommendations the Portfolio Holder was confident that Bromley had sufficient safeguards in place, but should never be complacent. The failure of a council should act as a wake-up call for all Council, but the true tragedy belonged to the 400 potential job losses.
- Numbers currently indicated a potential trend of spend which was in a large part met by the 22 various Covid related grants.
- Going forward the signs were less encouraging. Council tax reminders had been sent to 5,300 residents who were in serious arrears. From January 2021, the Council would be operating a Magistrates Court from the St. Blaise building to be used when all other avenues have failed. One key element was to address is the poor take up of direct debit at 63% against Bexley at 79%.
- In the new year a view would need to be taken on rent arrears from our properties, as the current policy of allowing delayed payment would result in an unrealistic backlog.

- Finally, on a positive note, the Council Pension Fund had once again been nominated for a national award.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update.

66 SCRUTINY OF THE EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT TO THE LEADER

The Executive Assistant to the Leader, Councillor Aisha Cuthbert, attended the meeting to respond to questions from the Committee. The Members noted the updated that had been circulated prior to the meeting and Councillor Cuthbert responded to questions, making the following comments:

- Since the start of the pandemic there had been an increase in the divorce rate and the consequence of this was that there had been an increase in loneliness. Community Links were looking at ways in which people across the Borough could be brought together.
- In terms of looking towards next year, the plan was to continue the momentum that had built up and harness the power of the thousands of volunteers who had responded when they were needed at the start of the pandemic.

The Committee thanked the Executive Assistant for her update and congratulated Councillor Cuthbert on the very successful Mums and Dads event in Orpington which had been very well received.

67 COST OF AGENCY WORKERS

The report provided information on the use and cost of agency workers across the Council and the ten highest paid agency workers. This information was provided to the Committee taking into account the Council's duty of care for affected individuals and the requirements of the DPA/GDPR Regulations 2018.

In opening the debate, the Chairman welcomed the reduction in the use of agency workers as evidenced in table 1 within the report.

In response to a question concerning whether the use of agency workers could be further reduced, the Director of HR highlighted the ongoing national shortage of experienced qualified social workers which impacted on the Council's ability to recruit good quality permanent staff. The Chairman of the Children, Education and Families PDS Committee reported that at its last meeting that Committee had commissioned a piece of work around the various initiatives that were in place to recruit and retain experienced social workers. The Committee noted that around 85% of social workers with the Department were on permanent contracts the Council was performing very well in comparison with other local authorities.

Members noted that there were a range of reasons why agency staff could be used such as for a time-limited project where specific expertise was required

or if a service review was being undertaken. In such circumstances the use of agency workers represented value for money. The Chairman asked that future reports provide a split between social work agency staff and non-social work staff.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

**68 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AS AMENDED BY THE
LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION)
(VARIATION) ORDER 2006, AND THE FREEDOM OF
INFORMATION ACT 2000**

RESOLVED that the Press and public be excluded during consideration of the items of business referred to below as it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that if members of the Press and public were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information.

**The following summaries
refer to matters involving exempt information**

**69 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 OCTOBER
2020**

The Part 2 (exempt) minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2020 were agreed, and signed as a correct record.

**70 PRE-DECISION SCRUTINY OF EXEMPT EXECUTIVE
REPORTS (if any)**

The Committee considered the following reports on the Part 2 agenda for decision by the Leader on or after 25 November 2020:

**(15) FORMAL CONSULTATION ON OUTLINE SERVICE PROPOSALS
AND PROCUREMENT STRATEGY OF A REPLACEMENT FINANCIAL
SYSTEM (PART 2)
Report FSD20087**

The Committee noted the report.

(17) CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2ND QUARTER 2020/21

The Committee noted the Part 2 Appendix.

71 PART 2 COST OF AGENCY WORKERS

The Committee noted the report.

The Meeting ended at 9.38 pm

Chairman