



18<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Dear Colleague

**JOINT SOFT MARKET TESTING OF BEXLEY AND BROMLEY'S LIBRARY SERVICES, INCLUDING THE SHARED SERVICE**

Further to my letter dated 12<sup>th</sup> May 2015 regarding Community Managed Libraries I am writing to inform you that the Council will also be conducting a joint soft market testing exercise with the London Borough Bexley to explore the possibility of commissioning both of the Councils' Library Services, including the Shared Service arrangements.

This exercise is in line with Bromley Council's commitment in its Corporate Operating Principles to be a commissioning organisation, determining who is best placed to deliver quality and value for money services, and was approved by the Council's Renewal & Recreation Policy Development & Scrutiny Committee and Portfolio Holder on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

You will remember that outsourcing of the library service was also the subject of staff consultation between 19<sup>th</sup> December 2014 and 31<sup>st</sup> January 2015 and public consultation between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014 and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015.

The purpose of the joint soft market testing exercise is to establish if there is sufficient and suitable market interest in the delivery of the Councils' Library Services.

Market providers will be invited to provide information by completing a questionnaire, a copy of which will be forwarded to you once the advert for the soft market testing exercise has been published in the relevant publications.

The soft market testing exercise will include community libraries, and will seek views on community management and on direct management of community libraries.

Should the soft market testing exercise establish that a market for the delivery of the Councils' Library Services exists; the results of the joint soft market testing exercise will be the subject of further consultation with library users and staff. The outcome of this consultation will be used to help inform the Councils' decision on the future of their Library Services.

The soft market testing exercise will include making contact with other Local Authorities to explore opportunities for collaborative working at the current time. This approach will ensure that the eventual proposals put forward for further public consultation take account of any wider opportunities should they emerge as options.

The soft market testing exercise will commence mid-May 2015 and it is expected that it will be finalised by the end of June 2015. It is anticipated that public consultation and staff engagement on the outcome of the soft market testing exercise will commence in July 2015.


The outcome of the joint soft market testing exercise and subsequent consultation and engagement will be considered by the Councils' relevant Committees in autumn 2015, before any next steps are agreed. If a decision is made at that time to proceed with outsourcing that is when the full procurement exercise would begin (late autumn 2015).

If you would like to participate in this soft market testing exercise, you can provide your views by completing the questionnaire. Please note that you must submit your questionnaire using the Council's e-procurement system ProContract at [www.londontenders.org](http://www.londontenders.org). If you require support to register or access the opportunity, please contact [community.development@bromley.gov.uk](mailto:community.development@bromley.gov.uk).

I understand that this exercise creates some uncertainty about the long term future of the Library Service; however I want to assure you that staff engagement will be our ongoing priority and we will seek to provide regular updates.

If you have any questions or queries in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**Colin Brand**  
**Assistant Director, Environment and Community Services**