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Dear Colleague

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

Further to my previous letter dated 18th May 2015, I am writing to update you that the Council has now completed a joint soft market testing exercise of Bexley and Bromley's library services, including the shared library service. The soft market testing exercise established that there is market interest in the delivery of the Councils' Library Services, and that the market believed that they had the ability to continue to deliver the range of library services currently offered whilst reducing the Councils' operating costs.

Given these findings, the Council will now publicly consult on the proposals to commission its library services. This public consultation will focus on explaining what is meant by a 'commissioned' library service to ensure that respondents can make an informed response. The purpose of the consultation is to establish whether a commissioned library service which continues to deliver the existing range of library services is preferable to a library service which is directly delivered by the Council, but must make service reductions to achieve savings.

The consultation period will run between 27th July and 16th September 2015. The public will be invited to respond to a questionnaire by either:

- Completing a paper version of the questionnaire available from the library
- Completing the questionnaire online
- Participating in a face to face survey with a market researcher.

Staff and their representatives are also invited to respond to the proposals or raise any queries that they have by emailing community.development@bromley.gov.uk by 16th September 2015.

The results of this consultation will, along with the outcome of the soft market testing exercise, inform the Councils' decision about whether or not to commission its library services.

Alongside public consultation, the Council will invite expressions of interest under the Community Right to Challenge. Under the Localism Act, voluntary and community groups, charities, parish councils, and local authority employees can submit expressions of interest to deliver part or all of a local authority service. The authority must consider expressions of interest and where they accept them then go on to run a procurement exercise for the service. From Monday 27th July, you will be able to get further information, or express an interest, by visiting www.bromley.gov.uk/CommunityRightToChallenge

The outcome of the soft market testing exercise and public consultation, and the response to the Community Right to Challenge notice will be considered by the Council's Executive Committee in a committee report in the autumn. At this time the Executive will also consider any comments from staff and their representatives that have been received in relation to the Council's proposals to commission its library services. It will be at this committee meeting that the Council will decide whether or not to go to the market. I will ask Tim Woolgar to notify you when the date for this meeting is confirmed.

I will be in contact again before the committee report is considered to update you on:

- The outcome of the public consultation
- The outcome of the Community Right to Challenge notice
- The recommendations that the committee report will make
- A summary of any responses received from staff and/or their representatives

As this is a joint exercise with the London Borough of Bexley, a separate letter has been sent by Bexley Council to Bexley library staff which outlines their process.

Update on community management at community libraries

Further to my letter dated 12th May 2015, I also write to provide you with a short update on the Council's advert seeking registrations of interest from groups or organisations who were interested in providing library services at Burnt Ash, Hayes, Mottingham, Shortlands, Southborough and St Paul's Cray Library.

We have received a good number of expressions of interest for all of these libraries and are now in the process of evaluating these to shortlist the number of organisations who will be invited to submit a business plan at the next stage.

I will write to you after the evaluation has been completed to provide a more detailed update.

Please note that the second stage of the procurement process for community libraries will commence in August but will not complete until later in the year. It is anticipated that the Council's Renewal & Recreation Portfolio Holder will make a decision about community libraries in the New Year.

I appreciate that uncertainty about the long term future of the library service remains; however I wanted to remind you of our ongoing commitment to staff engagement and to providing regular updates. Market testing or tendering services is commercially and politically sensitive and therefore there are various elements of the process that it is not possible to share with you in its fullest detail. However, please be assured that following any member decisions which impact on staff, you will be fully consulted on the consequences these proposals will have on your position in line with the Council's Procedures for Managing Change.

A copy of this letter has been sent to trade unions and departmental representatives for information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Colin Brand', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Colin Brand
Assistant Director, Environment and Community Services