

RESOURCES AND CONTRACTS PORTFOLIO HOLDER REPORT 20-11-2019

I will introduce my report by recognising that whilst the national 'mood music', is that Austerity is over and daily bulletins are released heralding that we have apparently found the 'money tree', money for Local Government has yet to appear on the agendas. We still face additional cost pressures which have to be contained, and good stewardship and sustainability will continue to be key in our approach. We will continue to ensure that we have robust financial planning in place and continue with the four year financial forecast.

FINANCE

TREASURY MANAGEMENT

Continued strong performance, including alternative investments now totalling £100m, have placed us in the top decile compared with other councils and will enable an additional 500k to be released into the forecast.

PENSION FUND

Sustained outstanding performance, resulting in national awards, have given confidence that the triennial valuation will declare us fully funded meaning that we will no longer have to provide for a deficit contribution of £2.1m pa.

EXCHEQUER CONTRACT

By letting the contract with Bexley, savings rising to £1m pa have been achieved. The contractor will make an initial investment of £12m.

LOBBYING

Members and officers continue to lobby for a better deal for Bromley. Although differed a year the council faces the impact of the fair funding review which will impact on funding from 2021/22. It is essential that we do all we can to keep abreast of the many changes coming down the line, and I am delighted that Bromley has been chosen to make contributions to round tables with DoE, MHCLG and DoH officers to help inform the next Government Spending Round.

MANAGING THE MONEY WELL

The council deals with significant financial resources and represents an organisation with a turnover of over £0.5bn, treasury funds of £300m and a pension fund value of over £1bn as well as a capital programme of over £150m. Examples of our performance include 94% of housing benefit claims processed within 14 days of all information being received, and sundry debt collection of 99.8%. We are working with our customers and have created a Care Management Assistant post and Recovery Visiting Officer working together with adult social care customers and their families in a more ethical approach to debt management and the recovery of social care charges.

I.T.

As part of our purchase of the Microsoft Productivity Licenses Office 365, we get the Microsoft AI 'Engine in the Cloud'. We are currently exploring this with a view to introducing Artificial Intelligence solutions for some processes such as Starters and Leavers as well as Recruitment. It is intended that this will enable long list to short list automation.

The I.T. transformation programme is on track for delivery as scheduled, and within budget. However, a temporary halt has been placed on development in accordance with election procedures, this will be caught back.

Network Upgrade - work is commencing on Wi Fi coverage to ensure that we have sufficient to enable the flexible working plans.

Server Upgrades, Window 7 to 10 Upgrade - Proof of concept work with a few users will be rolled out in January.

Laptops and Office-Purchased and being rolled out.

The net impact of the Programme will be to enable flexible working both internally and with partners, reduce cyber-attack, enable faster connectivity, enable facial recognition and Skype.

ELECTORAL AND REGISTRATION SERVICES

Whilst the Electoral Registration services are now in full flow, and preparations are in place, I regularly review with staff arrangement for December 12th, when I understand there is to be an election. Currently all appears well and I am confident that the team will distinguish themselves as ever. Meanwhile, the Registration Service has been transformed.

We register 3,000 deaths, 4,000 births and 2,500 marriages annually. Whilst we exceed the speed targets for births, we had fallen marginally behind in terms of deaths, but this is nearly there and will be met next year. The refurbishment of the Palace has reflected in increased bookings, and 353 weddings have been celebrated here this year. The team has also conducted 9 civil funeral ceremonies in lieu of families or loved ones.

Whilst much of our Customer Service is now conducted electronically, we still receive 40,000 visits annually into our Reception. The use of Assisted Technology which we have introduced into a Reception has enabled many more people to submit evidence in this way, leading to a reduction in waiting times. The Call Centre has dealt with over 150,000 service calls this year, a volume which doubled during the roll out of the waste changes and will also expand during the run up to the election. Bromley Knowledge has recently completed an upgrade to the corporate website operating system providing access to over 17 million pages of information and services while the number of MyBromley Account Holders has risen to 53,000 or 40% of households.

TRAINING AND APPRENTICESHIPS

The recently concluded apprenticeship cohort comprised of 24, 23 of whom have now secured permanent employment as a result - 9 within the council. One individual, who is now employed within housing, passed with a distinction and was accordingly short listed for the award 'London's Apprentice of the Year'. The training we offer is quite exceptional. In parallel we have a well-developed Graduate Internship scheme. Four members of staff now in senior management positions joined us as Graduate Trainees! The trainees join us for two years and are 'lent' to departments for specific projects.

There is a considerable amount going on in the HR department as we prepare our staff for the new 'world of work', not least the two Staff Conferences. It has to be recognised that we need to recruit the right staff, to motivate them, reward them appropriately, give them the right environment and continually invest in them. The move to Local Pay have us the flexibility to do just that.