

Decision Maker: GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Date: 11 February 2020

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: EXECUTIVE ASSISTANTS - ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

Contact Officer: Graham Walton, Democratic Services Manager
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Chief Officer: Mark Bowen, Director of Corporate Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

1.1 As part of this Committee's decisions in relation to the Members' Allowances Scheme 2008/09, it was agreed that this Committee should receive an annual report from each of the Executive Assistants outlining the work they have undertaken over the past year in justification of the receipt of their allowance (currently £3,655pa). This decision was reaffirmed by the Committee at subsequent meetings, and is referred to in the Guidance Note: Executive Assistants at Appendix 7 to the Council's Constitution. Five Executive Assistants were appointed by the Leader at the start of the 2019/20 Council year, with a sixth, Cllr Kieran Terry, appointed in December 2019 -

*Executive Assistant to the Leader - Cllr Aisha Cuthbert
Resources, Commissioning & Contract Management - Cllr Kira Gabbert
Renewal, Recreation & Housing - Cllr Hannah Gray
Adult Care & Health - Cllr Angela Page
Environment & Community Services - Cllr Will Rowlands
Children, Education & Families - Cllr Kieran Terry (appointed 4/12/19)*

1.2 Reports have been requested from the current Executive Assistants for 2019/20 and are attached as Appendix A.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to consider and, if appropriate, comment on the submissions received from the Executive Assistants relating to the work they have undertaken during 2019/20.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Not Applicable
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Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. BBB Priority: Excellent Council:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost: £21,930
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost: £21,930
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Democratic Representation
 4. Total current budget for this head: £1,087,810
 5. Source of funding: 2019/20 Revenue Budget
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional): Not applicable
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: Not applicable
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: None:
 2. Call-in: Not Applicable: This report does not involve an executive decision
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: Not applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): Six Councillors were appointed as Executive Assistants for 2019/20.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? No
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments: Not applicable

Non-Applicable Sections:	Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children, Policy, Financial, Personnel, Legal, Procurement
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	Previous reports to General Purposes & Licensing Committee

Reports from Executive Assistants, 2019/20

**(1) Cllr Aisha Cuthbert,
Executive Assistant to the Executive Assistant to the Leader**

Introduction

It's been a very busy year! I have been so grateful for the opportunity to meet residents, groups and organisations from across the borough in my role as EA to the Leader.

As I highlighted the last time I attended E&R for scrutiny, I continue to support our housing strategy – suggesting ideas and ways we can best work with our housing association partners to utilise our existing social housing, and to support regeneration projects where appropriate. I've also focused on a social initiative tackling loneliness and continued to organise and host our information playgroup session with Cllr Dykes, helping to promote our services and programmes to Bromley's busy young families.

I have given a brief description of activities undertaken below.

Housing

In July, I supported the housing team by organising an event in parliament to promote our draft housing strategy. The event was well attended and two of our MPs, Sir Bob Neill MP and Col. Bob Stewart MP, attended and gave overviews of the national housing policy agenda.



Tackling Loneliness

This year I also focused on tackling loneliness in Bromley which included hosting a Tackling Loneliness Together summit during National Loneliness Awareness week. The summit was attended by over 120 delegates from charities, residents' associations, faith groups, and various other relevant groups and societies.

Since the summit I have been working with charities and groups to help promote and support activities to help tackle loneliness in our communities.



Talk tots and tumble

Cllr Dykes and I continued to host our popular Talk, Tots and Tumble information-playgroup sessions for Bromley's busy young families. As I explained at last year's scrutiny meeting, we felt there was a need to reach out to Bromley's young families to share the programmes and services we offer. We know that young families are unlikely to be able to attend council meetings or get involved in the community as much as they would like, due to childcare commitments, so the purpose of the playgroup information sessions is to bring the information to them! We have traditionally hosted the session at the Glades in the soft play area, but we are offering to host a session in any ward that would like to have us! We hosted our first one by invitation in Orpington. If you would like us to come to your ward, please get in touch!



(2) **Cllr Kira Gabbert,
Executive Assistant to the Resources, Commissioning & Contract Management Portfolio
Holder**

Having been appointed by Cllr Graham Arthur in May 2019, this is my first year in the position of the Executive Assistant with this Portfolio. I shall briefly set out my involvement with the Portfolio to date.

Solar Farms: identifying potential sites and financial viability

The project is multifaceted and spans several Portfolios, however my initial focus was on a possibility of income generation. Subject to return on investment being acceptable, this project could prove extremely versatile. Solar farm(s) could generate additional income for the Council and at the same time help the Council achieve its' commitment to become carbon-neutral by 2029.

I initially looked at West Suffolk Council's owned Toggan Farm, at their financial model and expected rate of return on investment.

I have also examined the financial model for one of the West Sussex Council solar farms, and both the projected rate of return over 20 years and a payback time were found to be favourable. Broadly, returns could be expected to be in the range of 6-9% per year. Investment required is in the region of £700K-1M per 1MW unit (excluding cost of land, on an assumption that units would be built on Council owned land). An initial meeting was held with a firm that facilitate investments into solar farms, and following the meeting a decision was made to research the possibilities further.

Having briefly looked at several sites within the Borough that had been previously considered and found unacceptable and which still didn't appear viable for various reasons, I have asked

the Council's Carbon Programme Manager to compile a comprehensive list of all potentially suitable sites.

The list is now being compiled employing three sources (Cushman & Wakefield, GIS software and the Council's Asset Register). Once suitable sites are identified, cross-checked and shortlisted, a detailed technical site(s) assessment will be progressed. Quotations for detailed assessments are being sought.

In terms of funding, a meeting was held with a firm that administers the Mayor of London Energy Efficiency Fund. Low interest loans can be obtained for solar farms' purposes but certain conditions, including technical, should be met. This is something that can be evaluated once the sites and potential achievable energy output is better understood.

There are of course important planning considerations and hurdles to overcome including the issue of Green Belt. However, with the carbon management agenda gaining traction, it should be possible to make a strong case demonstrating benefits to solar farm projects. Ultimately, land can easily be returned to Green Belt following dismantling of units once solar farms' lifespan comes to an end (~ 25 years).

I know that officers in the Environment department and members of the Environment and Community Services PDS Committee are taking a close interest in this project from the perspective of achieving the Council's carbon neutral target, and updates will be provided in due course to all relevant PDS committees.

HR and procedures

I have initiated discussions with HR department on a subject of disclosure obligations applicable to those Council employees working with children, families and vulnerable adults, but which employees are not necessarily qualified social care professionals. This is being carefully considered in the context of Statement of Employment Particulars, Contract of Employment, prescribed regulatory bodies' requirements and the implied duty of mutual trust.

Customer Services, Liberata and digital self-service drive

Earlier this month, I spent a day at the Reception and the Call Centre, both run by Liberata. The experience was thought-provoking and positive. I have to compliment Liberata on their smooth and professional running of the service. I witnessed the staff going an extra mile to help our most vulnerable residents, for example those struggling with housing issues, even on a day when no scheduled housing appointments are normally held.

On the operations side, I was impressed by the drive to steer residents towards digital self-service. The focus is on educating residents how to perform simple IT tasks, for example scanning and attaching documents to claim forms using PCs and iPads (which are available in the Reception area for free use by the residents) and their phones. But there is more to be done. With the operations manager, we examined the current landscape of digital self-service and talked about how Liberata are hoping to progress the initiatives further. We discussed barriers potentially preventing the widening of services transformation. Migration away from legacy systems, as well as changing residents' behaviors would often be considered as main barriers. What I observed on the day was that, as long as residents felt they had help and support available they were very much willing to try self-service.

The configuration of the Reception area would be something to look at, as part of a wider review, to see if this space could be made more suitable and conducive to self-service.

There are big savings to be achieved through digital transformation program, and I shall be looking at our overall digital self-service strategy and particularly at barriers to implementation in this area and within other departments.

I also spent some time with the Registrars, observing their work on an ordinary day. The service the team members are providing is simply outstanding, with a particular focus on customer satisfaction. At the same time the department is delivering the highly ambitious income targets.

I have joined meetings with the Portfolio Holder and the officers as and when required as well as regularly attending Executive, Resources and Contracts PDS Committee meetings.

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**(3) Cllr Hannah Gray,
Executive Assistant to the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Portfolio Holder**

I have been delighted to continue as Executive Assistant to Cllr Morgan since being invited to the post in 2017. At the beginning of 2019 Cllr Morgan also asked me to include in my role the Small Business Champion and to continue with the Night time economy liaison for the GLA appointed Night Czar.

In my role, I have attended monthly meetings with Cllr Morgan and also more recently, after the reshuffle, I have arranged progress meetings with Hannah Jackson and Lydia Lee.

My initial project has been to develop a strategy to ensure that Bromley has the best coverage possible for both Broadband and Mobile. This is proving to be a time consuming and frustrating project as the LBB officers have changed regularly. However with Hannah Jackson including it in her regeneration plan it appears that things are finally moving forward. In order to progress this project I have met with Hannah Jackson and other professionals and specialists in this sphere; researched the current situation and providers that would be able to offer a better service and will continue to negotiate with potential providers. Previously I met with Steve Barnes (deputy chair of Downe residents association and former Senior BT Executive in this field) who successfully increased the coverage in the Downe area and whose knowledge has been invaluable and will be very useful going forward. I have also met with local Tier 1 providers who are keen to be involved.

I have attended Bromley Economic Partnership meetings and increased the awareness of the meeting by inviting additional influential businesses. Cllr Morgan has identified the benefits that can be had from creating an open networking session in conjunction with the Bromley Economic Partnership meetings. Cllr Morgan is aware of my extensive networking experience with small and medium size business and has therefore tasked me with expanding his idea. I have developed this in order for local businesses to strengthen their relationship, communication, mutual support and provide an environment for off agenda discussions.

With my new position I have continued to work closely with all small business network groups and set up a "Movers and Shakers" group, in order to promote good communication and help with the small business community. We have had a successful "Get fit for Tender" event working with the FSB, where small businesses were informed and guided regarding tendering for an LBB contract. We are currently organising a "Meet the Buyer" event, with FSB and other sponsors, to be held 18th March. This will bring together the larger contractors with the smaller businesses with a view to them being able to subcontract for them and get a piece of the pie. I have liaised with the BID teams to offer assistance on projects and surveys.

I have also attended Night Czar Meetings representing Bromley during discussions at City Hall re London's night time economy and as a result we had a visit from the Night Czar who had a fantastic tour of the night life in Bromley ranging from McDonalds, Churchill Theatre, pubs, restaurants and the Vivo night club.

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**(4) Cllr Angela Page,
Executive Assistant to the Adult Care & Health Portfolio Holder**

This is my third year in the position of Executive Assistant to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health, Cllr Diane Smith.

As agreed with the Portfolio Holder at the beginning of the municipal year, this year my main focus has been on Adult Care & Health complaints. I receive a weekly update on any current or outstanding complaints and monitor progress with the Interim Director for Adult Social Care and Head of Service for Customer Engagement and Complaints. I also monitor and review the few complaints that are made to the Local Government Ombudsman, again liaising with the Head of Service for Customer Engagement and Complaints. This particular work stream is very much ongoing with the aim to reduce referrals to the Local Government Ombudsman by ensuring that complaints received by the Council are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner within the agreed procedure. In addition to this I am also looking into LB Bromley complaints process policy and making comparisons to other London Boroughs.

Also this year, as in others since my appointment to the Executive Assistant post, I have continued to directly monitor the work of the Contract Compliance and Monitoring team and am extremely pleased to see that the number of care homes rated good has improved each year during my time in the Executive Assistant Role. The percentage of Bromley care homes rated good or above has improved over the last three years to 87% at December 2019, compared to 77% in December 2018 and 65% in December 2017. The Portfolio Holder has delegated to me responsibility for taking part in the regular compliance and contract monitoring visits as part of the overall oversight of the Care Homes Quality Assurance process where I accompany Officers on some scheduled visits and contribute to the report findings. I receive a weekly report from the CQC setting out which inspection reports are published. If appropriate I follow up with the contracts monitoring team to establish what actions (if any) need to be taken.

It has also been agreed by the Portfolio Holder that I should be the Member connection with Healthwatch Bromley. This is a very new piece of work with the first meeting having taken place on 28th January.

As well as the specific projects mentioned above, I attend the fortnightly Portfolio Holder Briefing meetings with the Interim Director for Adult Social Care and senior departmental officers. I accompany the Portfolio Holder to meetings with outside stakeholders e.g. Daycare providers within the LB Bromley. I also attend the Adult Care and Health PDS as an observer and Audit Committee meetings as an observer on behalf of the Portfolio Holder when relevant reports are on the agenda.

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**(5) Cllr Will Rowlands,
Executive Assistant to the Environment & Community Services Portfolio Holder**

It has been a pleasure to have succeeded Cllr Gabbert and become Executive Assistant to the Environment and Community Services Portfolio Holder.

The Environment and Community Services Portfolio is arguably the biggest portfolio within the Council. My job for this year has mainly been to assist Cllr Huntington-Thresher in ensuring that the portfolio is run as effectively as it can be. This has also included working with Nigel Davis and his successor Colin Brand, the Director of Environment and Public Protection, as well as others within the portfolio.

We identified three areas for me to focus on this year; Fix my Street, a campaign to deter fly tipping, as well as the Council's arboriculture contract. I'll go through each of these below.

Fix my street

This is in my opinion, as well as residents throughout the borough I have spoken to, is one of our key weapons in keeping the standards of this Council's environment department high. By monitoring this, I have been able to identify any patterns which are emerging (e.g. we have a contractor underperforming or fly tippers are targeting two or three certain areas at a time). It has also helped us maintain safety and efficiency on our public roads and footpaths, as well as helping housing associations for example spot issues they face on their property.

Fly tipping

Nobody likes a fly tipper; they destroy our countryside, leave the taxpayer with high clean up bills and are a general nuisance to communities across our borough. A lot of them come from outside of the borough too. We highlighted the main areas which fall victim to this criminality and unleashed a poster campaign to deter people from fly tipping. I have seen first-hand in my own ward that it has had a positive impact with fly tipping reports falling.

Arboriculture

Due to a change in contractor, we have had a backlog of tree work which needed attention. It was decided, that given my background in my other job, I would shadow the arboriculture side of things and see what could be done to catch up on the backlog faced. Despite initially facing challenges in recruitment, as well as other challenges which we are normally faced with when changing contractor, we are catching up.

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**(6) Cllr Kieran Terry,
Executive Assistant to the Children, Education & Families Portfolio Holder**

I took up the role as Executive Assistant to the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education and Families in December 2019. Since taking up the role I have taken a number of steps to familiarise myself with this complex portfolio, including attending the recent PDS committee and a number of meetings with senior officers relating to budgets, school places and challenges facing the portfolio more widely. I have also met with some of the key community groups serving children in the borough including Bromley Y. I have really enjoyed meeting these people who share such passion for improving the lives of the young people of our borough.

Moving forwards my role will be to develop stronger relationships with similar groups and to also play a key role in the financial aspects of the portfolio, identifying necessary efficiencies in the existing service and keeping a close eye on budgets whilst maintaining the best quality of service. I am really excited about my involvement in this new role and the opportunities it presents for me to make a positive difference to the lives of young people in Bromley.

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