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**Decision Maker:** GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

**Date:** 9 February 2021

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

**Title:** EXECUTIVE ASSISTANTS - ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21

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

**Ward:** All

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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 £3,746pa). 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. Six Executive Assistants were appointed by the Leader for the 2020/21 Council year -

*Executive Assistant to the Leader - Cllr Aisha Cuthbert*

*Adult Care & Health - Cllr Angela Page*

*Children, Education & Families - Cllr Kieran Terry*

*Environment & Community Services - Cllr Will Rowlands*

*Renewal, Recreation & Housing - Cllr Yvonne Bear*

*Resources, Commissioning & Contract Management - Cllr Kira Gabbert*

- 1.2 Reports have been requested from the current Executive Assistants for 2020/21 and are attached as Appendix A. Two reports are to follow and will be circulated as soon as they are available.

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2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to note and consider the submissions received from Executive Assistants relating to the work they have undertaken during 2020/21.

### 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: £22,476
  2. Ongoing costs: Recurring Cost: £22,476
  3. Budget head/performance centre: Democratic Representation
  4. Total current budget for this head: £1,062,270
  5. Source of funding: 2020/21 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 2020/21.
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### Ward Councillor Views

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

<b>Non-Applicable Sections:</b>	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, 2020/21****(1) Cllr Aisha Cuthbert,  
Executive Assistant to the Leader****Introduction**

It's been a very strange year and since the pandemic hit, we have all had to work to find new and innovative ways to reach out to residents. Our tackling loneliness work is no different and I have been working with our partners in the third sector to ensure that we continue to provide services to those that need it.

I have given a brief description of activities undertaken below.

**My work on tackling loneliness****Securing funding for community groups**

Before the pandemic, I was working closely with Community Links Bromley to bring together like-minded charities to raise the profile of services for Bromley residents experiencing loneliness or social isolation from all different backgrounds and walks of life. Once the pandemic hit, the goal posts moved but I was keen to do my part to help secure help for our charities doing so much to help our residents.

I was pleased to help secure a £15,000 grant from Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group) for Community Links Bromley which was the lead charity for coordinating our emergency response to support our residents. The Clarion Futures Emergency Support Fund (Communities) and (Food) is awarded to support community organisations to respond to critical local need during the Coronavirus pandemic and to support the community.

The contribution was used to support a COVID-19 Voluntary and Community Sector response for Bromley. In total a sum of £172,302 was distributed. Applications were received from 53 local organisations who applied for a total of £347,254. Inevitably this meant that some organisations were unsuccessful and others received less than the sums that they requested, with an average award being £4,534.

Specifically the Clarion Futures grant was used to support two specific charities. They were LATCH (Bromley Churches Housing Action) and Leonard Cheshire both charities were working hard during the lockdown to support their clients and to reach out to ensure they supported their customers during a very difficult and isolating time. LATCH received a grant of £10,000. This was to enable the charity to continue supporting vulnerable locals in the Borough of Bromley whom they assist in urgent homeless situations.

Leonard Cheshire were awarded £5,000 in funding to obtain additional supplies of PPE equipment to help ensure that they can keep frontline staff, residents and the community safe.

The money also went to support residents at St Cecilia's care home in Bromley. St Cecilia's in Bromley delivers care and nursing for 29 adults with physical disabilities and complex needs. The dedicated staff provide personalised support for each resident, ensuring everyone can live as independently as they choose. All residents are in the 'extremely vulnerable' category.

When the pandemic started, St Cecilia's closed its doors to residents' friends and families to control the spread of Covid-19. This has had a profound impact on residents, many of whom

struggled with the effects of isolation. The staff played a vital role in supporting the residents through with a range of different services and are enabling vulnerable disabled people to live as independently as possible.



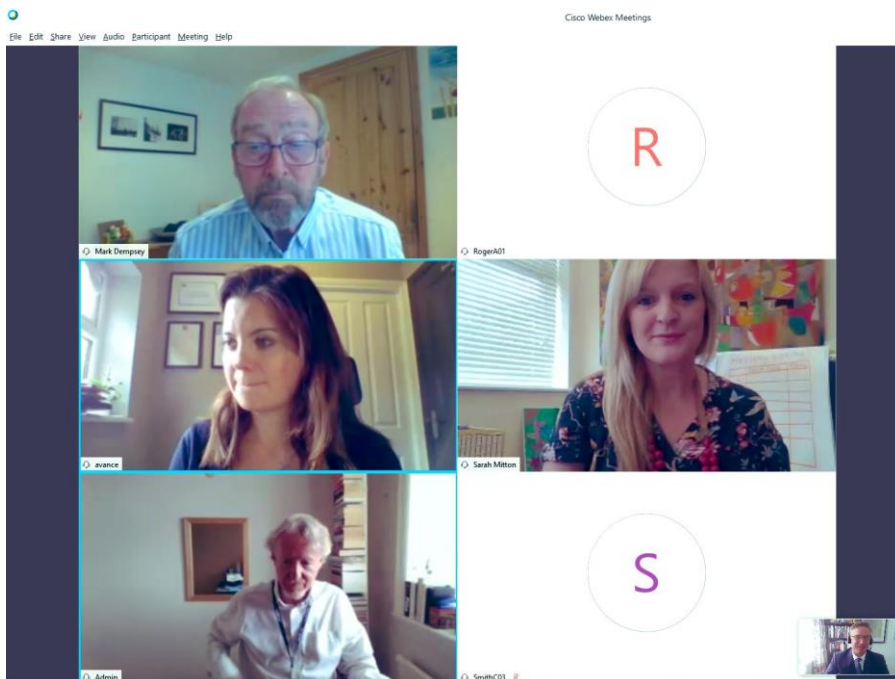
Source: Thank You Tweet from Leonard Cheshire 19 July/Retweeted by CLB 20 July

In addition to these specific grants, the overall fund was used to support two Nottingham based organisations. They were the Central Eltham Youth Project and the Nottingham Food Bank. They received £3,250 to support local food provision in the area to meet the challenges of local food poverty.

### **Virtual 'Loneliness Awareness Week event'**

I was very pleased to organise and host a virtual panel 'Tackling Loneliness' event on WebEx during loneliness awareness week.

The panel consisted of representatives from organisations in Bromley, including Magpie Dance Company, Clarion Futures (part of Clarion Housing Group) and Community Links Bromley. Many groups across the borough have worked to deliver their services online and through digital platforms to ensure they can still reach out to Bromley residents during the lockdown. I was pleased to be able to ask the panel questions about how they are currently tackling loneliness and how they plan to in the future. We also invited members of the public to email questions for the panel. We received a large volume of questions and probably most surprisingly quite a few around loneliness and divorce which just goes to show that loneliness can affect anyone at any time in their life.



**Screenshot from the event**

I have had a few residents contact me since the event to offer their support. One resident who contacted me developed a website to help people make friends online.

I would like to make a special mention to the Leader, Cllr Colin Smith for his continued support on this project and Cllr Gary Stevens who supported the event and ensured we could deliver it digitally. Thank you both!

### **Working with our libraries to promote virtual play events**

One of the cohorts we're aware of who suffer from isolation and loneliness is new mums and dads. Especially since the pandemic hit and playgroups have been cancelled – it can be difficult for new parents to feel connected and supported when they have no one to talk to or befriend. So, I was very pleased when I became aware of a new initiative that GLL are hosting so the very popular bounce and rhymes groups can continue virtually! I have helped them promote on social media and through our local community groups facebook pages. The events have been well attended and feedback has been very positive.



**Come along to our  
Bromley Libraries  
Zoom Group  
For new Mums and  
Dads**

- Informal group with your baby aged up to 12 months
- Singing Songs and Rhymes
- Benefits of singing and looking at books
- Chat with other Mums and Dads
- Starts Wednesday 7th October 10.00-10.45
- To book your free place contact Orpington Library:  
[orpington.library@gll.org](mailto:orpington.library@gll.org)



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

I was delighted to be asked to continue in the position of Executive Assistant to the Portfolio Holder for Adult Care & Health, Cllr Diane Smith a position that I have held since May 2017. My focus at the start of this municipal year, was centred around continuing and developing some work that I had already been asked to oversee on behalf of the Portfolio Holder as well as a new project highlighted at the end of this report.

To date, I have continued to have oversight of Adult Care & Health complaints where I receive a weekly update on any current or outstanding complaints from the Head of Service for Customer Engagements and Complaints, and which may if required involve further discussion with the Interim Director for Adult Care & Health. It is essential that any complaints are not only dealt with within the timescales set out in the Corporate Complaints Policy but are also dealt with appropriately. As there has been a reduction in the number of complaints received, whilst still monitoring closely, my attention in this area is very much on any cases referred to the Local Government Ombudsman.

My second continued area of focus has been monitoring the work of the Contract Compliance team. Despite monitoring visits having to cease due to the pandemic, the team have continued to monitor care homes closely particularly in the respect of Covid-19 and I am given a regular update.

At the time of my last report to the committee, I had just started a new piece of work at the request of the Portfolio Holder which was to be the member connection and liaison with Healthwatch Bromley. I have had virtual meetings with the Operations Manager to discuss and at times question the content in reports they have produced. I am also due to accompany the Healthwatch Team on a virtual 'Enter and View'.

During the year I was asked by the Portfolio Holder to take on a new project and to assist her with the oversight of the new Learning Disability Strategy for Bromley, that sets out the direction in relation to young people and adults with a Learning Disability. As part of this important piece of work, I am Co-Chairman of the Learning Disability Partnership Board. This has been formed in order to have oversight of the delivery of the aforementioned Learning Disability Strategy which aims to enable people with Learning Disabilities in Bromley, to live their lives as they want by providing the right support, whilst giving them improved choice and control in their life opportunities. This is a very exciting and crucial piece of work especially with the immense impact of Covid-19 and the restrictions this has created.

As well as these specific pieces of work, I continue to attend the (now virtual) fortnightly Portfolio Holder Briefing meetings with the Interim Director for Adult Care and Health and senior departmental officers. I also attend virtual meetings with stakeholders along with or on behalf of the Portfolio Holder as appropriate as well as attending the Adult Care & Health PDS and Health Scrutiny Committee meetings as an observer.

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

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

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(5) **Cllr Yvonne Bear,**  
**Executive Assistant to the Renewal, Recreation and Housing Portfolio Holder**

Appointed in May 2020, my first few months as EA have been very busy particularly due to the Covid pandemic which has seriously affected the portfolio in a numerous ways, including forcing our leisure facilities and libraries to close/find new ways of working, increasing demand for temporary accommodation particularly for rough sleepers, reducing rental income from council assets and initiating work to deliver grants to businesses impacted by Covid restrictions. All this whilst trying to deliver transformational housing, planning and digital strategies. It has been a busy year but one in which satisfying progress has been made.

In order to become fully involved with the full breadth of activity within the portfolio, I attend the weekly update call between the senior officers and portfolio holder as well as briefings on key initiatives such as Site G, the Regeneration strategy and the new Local Plan. I have assumed the roles of Small Business Champion for the borough and Lead Member for Economic Development at the London Councils meetings and attend the Bromley Economic Partnership meetings.

Specific initiatives I have taken the lead on include:

- **Covid Business Grants:** To assist businesses whose trading has been affected by Covid restrictions, numerous grant schemes have been provided by government which the council has had to administer. Working with officers and partners, processes have been defined which have ensured secure, fair, efficient and timely distribution of grants. Over £50m had been paid out to over 5000 businesses in the borough under the various grant schemes as at 31/12/2020. In addition, £6.6m of discretionary grant funding has been made available to the council. A proposal for how to make best use of these funds has been developed with officers to help businesses both in the short and long term. This was approved at Executive in early January and rollout will commence shortly.
- **Business Support Taskforce:** A fortnightly meeting has been established between officers, the BIDs and business support organisations to discuss council support for businesses during the pandemic and to ensure effective communications with the business community. For 2 months during the summer, I chaired this meeting whilst awaiting the appointment of a new Head of Renewal.
- **Economic Development Plan:** Given the unprecedented impact on businesses in the borough of the pandemic, I initiated work on the boroughs first Economic Development Plan to guide economic recovery and growth. A joint initiative between Renewal and Planning Policy, the plan will provide a broad profile of Bromley's current economic activity, an understanding of key pressures and challenges and a road map of how these will be tackled to achieve a 10 year vision. Following external consultation with businesses and business support organisations, the aim will be to bring the report to RRH PDS in Spring 2021.
- **Digital Infrastructure Strategy:** Working with officers, a clearly articulated strategy to deliver borough wide coverage of full fibre broadband and 5G mobile connectivity is being developed. A Memorandum of Understanding is in negotiation with OpenReach and a framework is being developed for mobile providers regarding 5G rollout. An outline of the proposals has been presented to the portfolio Holder and the full strategy will come forward to RRH PDS in February 2021.
- **Star Lane Traveller Site:** Following persistent reports of ASB at the site in the form of bonfires, fly tipping and quad biking, in conjunction with local police and officers, a major raid

was conducted in October 2020. Since the police action, many of the key issues have been tackled and a strategic plan has been developed with officers to improve the site going forward, including installation of a robust perimeter fence.

2021 will see significant focus on business recovery, restoring leisure and library services, development of the new Local Plan and delivery of the housing strategy with the first council built homes becoming available.

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

This is my second year in the position of the Executive Assistant with this Portfolio. I shall briefly set out my involvement with the Portfolio since my last report to the Committee.

**Solar Farm:**

I have continued working on the Solar farm project. As was reported previously, the aim would be to generate additional income for the Council and at the same time help the Council achieve its' commitment to become carbon-neutral by 2029.

The officers initially came up with a comprehensive list of all potentially suitable sites. Of the 15 sites that have been identified, we have focused on 5 sites offering the most potential. The Legal team completed Tenancy/Lease reviews of these. In September 2020, a consultant was appointed to conduct a technical and commercial feasibility assessment to understand both the technical and commercial potential of each of these sites.

In December, the report came back: one of the 5 sites assessed was deemed suitable for the project. With any potential site, there are typically the following main hurdles to satisfy: financial viability, the site location (Green Belt in this case) and proximity to a grid connection. A suitable grid connection exists quite close to the site in question.

These are the next steps necessary to move the project forward:

- **Planning:** decide on approach and evaluate obstacles to constructing a solar farm on Green Belt
- **Finance options/Business Case:** revising financial models, assessing the payback period, finance options and how the potential generated income would compare to income currently received from existing Council reserves. Various finance options are being looked into, including into grants and low interest finance for low-carbon initiatives.

Currently, there are indications that the payback time may be too long for the project to be deemed viable, but a revised financial model with various underlying assumptions will need to be considered before coming to a conclusion on the viability.

**HR: procedures**

Having initiated discussions with HR department on a subject of disclosure obligations applicable to employees working with children, families and vulnerable adults, I am pleased to see the suggestions being incorporated into revised drafts of procedural documents.



## **HR: employees' well-being, productivity and the future of home working and flexi-working**

I started this project by making enquiries with the HR team about how Bromley Council is looking after its' employees emotional and physical well-being, in the circumstances where close to 90% of our staff have been deployed to work from home. The Council was well prepared in terms of deploying staff to work from home and providing the necessary support, having invested significant time and resources in our IT technologies. Workplace modernisation was one of the work streams of the Transformation Programme.

A number of strategies and support programmes have been put in place to support staff working from home during the pandemic. These strategies are informed by HR and health and safety data and feedback from stakeholders including the Staff Survey Group, staff and staff representatives. Homeworking health and safety guidance is in place, and workstation support programme allowed employees to claim towards setting up a workstation in their home. There are a number of training and development opportunities, employee assistance programme and wellbeing support programme, among other initiatives. All these initiatives are well received. Staff sickness levels between March and November 2020 have been significantly lower compared to the same period last year. I am confident that the level of support provided to our staff is outstanding and our HR leaders should be congratulated on their initiatives' success.

Having found ourselves in these extraordinary circumstances, we now have to think about the future of flexible working and home working arrangements. This involves measuring productivity and output for conventional ways vs flexible ways of working. With that in mind, I have set out to analyse the productivity statistics of one of the many Council's departments, with the view to eventually completing the same exercise for every department.

Early indications of my research point towards reduced productivity during the initial period of the lockdown, when the switch to home working has taken place. It appears that this is largely a result of employees not having caught up with electronic workflow and having had to move to paperless way of working without proper planning and advance warning. It is hoped that in the longer term this should not continue, as the workflows and systems around home working should have improved over time.

My research is on-going, with one department data currently being analysed, and others to follow.

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