



# Finance and Resources

## Cabinet Member Bulletin

### Councillor Simon Hall

January 2019

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## Senior Management Appointments

Following Richard Simpson's decision to leave the Council, some new appointments have been made.

First of all, Jacqueline Harris-Baker, Director of Law and Council Monitoring Officer, has been appointed Interim Executive Director of Resources. She will continue to be the Council Monitoring Officer. This appointment will take effect at the beginning of February, thus ensuring there is a smooth transition.

Secondly, Lisa Taylor, our Director of Finance, Investment and Risk and Deputy Section 151 Officer, will become the Section 151 Officer, again at the beginning of February.

Thirdly, Sean Murphy, Head of Commercial and Property Law and Deputy Monitoring Officer, has been appointed Interim Director of Law, again taking effect at the beginning of February.

I would like to congratulate these excellent officers. It is also another example of how we develop our staff.

## Draft Local Government Settlement 2019

A week later than scheduled, the Government finally published its draft local government settlement on December 13. This confirmed the anticipated £7.8m. underlying cut to the main funding we get from Government. Whilst there has been some funding for social care and other one-off money announced, we have seen a net reduction in cash and considerable reduction in real terms, despite a growing population and increasing need. Added to this, we have seen £0.6m. taken out of our public health funding, meaning a cash reduction of c. 10% over the last three years.

Since the start of austerity, in real terms, we have lost nearly three quarters of our government funding.

We have responded to the consultation on this draft settlement, pointing out the serious underfunding that the proposed local government settlement represents, both generally and for Croydon more specifically.

This approach from the government is exacerbated by the very significant shortfall in the funding for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and the ongoing effects of universal credit.

In addition, Government has announced yet another consultation on future funding for local government. We will respond, of course. Given the timetable for this consultation and the ongoing delays to the next Spending Review, we are unlikely to know what the funding for 2020/21 is before November 2019, which makes medium term financial planning even more challenging.

**AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON – DELIVERING FOR CROYDON**



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## Draft Budget

I presented our draft budget to Scrutiny on 15 January.

This showed how we are proposing to balance the budget for 2019/20 despite the wholly inadequate and iniquitous funding from central government. It shows how the tight financial management we have in place and proactive approach we have to financial management and planning, are allowing us to be on the front foot.

I will, of course, be presenting the final budget proposals to Cabinet and Council in February.

I would like to pay tribute to the Leader and Cabinet and the many hard working officers who have been involved in the budgeting process, for the joined up working and engagement that has delivered these budget proposals, which will see us balancing the books whilst delivering to our residents, with implementation of our manifesto commitments, despite the funding shortfall.

## Asset Investment Strategy

We have successfully taken in the assets acquired over the last few months and the second phase of the Colonnades acquisition is progressing well.

The Council will always look at asset opportunities, but will only pursue them, where we consider they meet the objectives of the Fund. This has resulted in our not pursuing a number of assets that were identified or where the council was approached.

## Council Tax Billing

The team is already working very hard to ensure that there is a very smooth process in getting out the council tax bills for the current year.

## Accounts

In order to ensure that we meet the very tight deadlines for preparing and having the audit complete on the accounts, a lot of work is already taking place, taking learning from last year. Indeed, the external auditors are undertaking their interim visit at the moment.



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## Croydon.digital

We have launched a new brand and community site to convene and celebrate Croydon's vibrant tech scene, and talk openly about our work on digital within the council too.

You can find it at <https://croydon.digital> and please do subscribe to the blog to get updates on our progress in digital transformation, and for information about how to get involved in shaping the digital strategy.

The reaction in the local tech sector to this and the changes the Council is making to its IT department and digital presence has been very positive.

## Digital Strategy

Work on developing a new digital strategy will start this month with the aim of publishing the strategy by July. The strategy will be developed in wide consultation with Croydon residents, businesses, and digital government experts.

Work will start soon on improving the council's website design and usability. The new Croydon Digital Service will be working on new designs that will ensure the user experience is consistently good across our web estate and improve both our content and online transactions, testing with residents to ensure they meet their needs.

Improvements are also being made on the Council's CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system, forms and interfaces, which will improve residents' experience and allow for more effective follow-up by the Council.

## Parental and sickness leave for members

I am delighted we are bringing to January Council, provisions for parental and long term sickness leave for Councillors. If we are to enable the widest range of Councillors and support Councillors in their role, then this is an excellent step. I am proud we have gone further than the recommendations various bodies have made in this regard.