



Funding for Children Services' improvement

Over £2 million has been allocated to fund improvement initiatives within Children Services following the Ofsted review.

I chair a Children Improvement Finance Group that considers requests and allocates funding to initiatives. This group, which includes Cllr Flemming, Richard Simpson and Barbara Peacock, ensures that there is strong governance for such expenditure.

Areas that have been allocated to include:

- Additional social work teams, to allow case loads to be brought down
- Increased level of business support, to allow social workers to focus more on children
- Increased levels of advocacy, return home interviews and independent visits
- Investment in workforce recruitment and retention
- Programme Management resource
- Expert advice on key areas

This expenditure is being funded from transformation and so does not give rise to an in-year revenue pressure.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

We have still had no responses from the various letters to Home Office ministers, including a letter sent by me to the Immigration Minister in March.

This means that Croydon Council still has a very substantial shortfall in the funding it gets as a gateway authority, as against the costs it incurs. This includes costs incurred due to the Home Office failing to enact legislation passed two years ago.

This is another example of how Croydon is being shortchanged by national government.

Legal Services Contract

We made the decision to overhaul our legal services. As part of this, a significantly increased number of areas of law will now be undertaken by in-house lawyers. This will enable the service to be more efficient and responsive, as well as saving money.

We also made the decision, to have a single firm of lawyers, to act as our provider and provide our external legal advice. This will ensure economies of scale, reduced risk of duplication and enable there to be a tighter control on what legal services are requested. There was very strong interest in this contract and so the competition was tough.



New tenants in Bernard Weatherill House

The DWP and the Home Office are taking space in Bernard Weatherill House.

This provides considerable income and reduced costs to the Council, which is in line with our commitment to make the most of the Council's assets and in total contrast to the approach of the previous administration.

In addition, in the case of the DWP, it allows greater convenience for our residents, as it means Access Croydon and the DWP office (replacing the Job Centre on Dingwall Road) will be next to each other.

Braithwaite Hall

As members will be aware, one of the areas that is being leased to DWP is the old Community Space in Bernard Weatherill House.

As promised, we have completed works on Braithwaite Hall, which means that its capacity is now greater than that of the community space. This will therefore ensure that community events will be able to continue to take place.

ICT Sourcing

We are currently reviewing the contracting model for ICT, as the current contract has a review point in May 2019 and we want to ensure we take the opportunity to reconsider the model and whether we might deliver more of our technology in-house or with different partners. Our current thinking is to break up the current contract, with a mixture of in-house and specialist suppliers. This type of approach is in line with our make-or-buy methodology, which has delivered excellent results in other parts of the Council, such as Facilities Management, where we have improved service and saved money.

IRRV Awards

We were successful in winning the national award for Innovation (channel shift) for the work in benefits, with the Gateway team. This was about how many benefit customers are dealt with online, but then how we identify those to not process on-line and provide the wider support. This provides efficiency savings, whilst fully supporting the most vulnerable.

The IRRV is the Institute of Revenue, Ratings and Valuation, the national organisational for council tax, business rates benefits, debt etc.



Internal Audit Contract

New internal audit provider is being selected. This will to give assurance that the council's governance and internal control arrangements are working well. Croydon is leading on behalf of over 30 other councils to get the best deal with a significant sized contract with extra volume discounts for Croydon.

Anti-Fraud Team

The anti-fraud team had identified over £600k worth of fraud against the council in the first half year. This will enable moneys to be recovered for use in delivering much needed services or return of assets such as council houses for use by people in real need. In addition, 16 blue badges have been confiscated because of fraudulent use, depriving genuine users of access to spaces and/or evading the payment of parking charges in the borough.

Democratic Services software

The new modern.gov, paperless committee management system is being implemented to enable Members to manage agendas and reports better and saving large amounts of paper and money. There will also be better access to documents for the public when the website front end is fully up and running.