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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

17 JULY 2018

(7.15 pm - 9.36 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Laxmi Attawar, John Dehaney, Oonagh Moulton, Rebecca Lanning, Owen Pritchard and Pauline Cowper, Eleanor Stringer, Carl Quilliam, Nick McLean

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Alambritis, Leader of the Council, Ged Curran, Chief Executive, John Dimmer, Head of Policy and Partnerships and Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Sally Kenny (substituted by Councillor Eleanor Stringer), Councillor Paul Kohler (substituted by Councillor Carl Quilliam), Councillor David Williams (substituted by Councillor Nick McLean) and co-opted members; Colin Powell, Helen Forbes and Emma Lemon.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

The minutes were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting.

4 QUESTIONS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE - PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR 2018/19 (Agenda Item 4)

The Leader of the Council said the current priorities are looking after the most vulnerable including; adults, children and low income families.

Other priorities include securing affordable housing in the borough, the impact of Brexit, ensuring repatriated EU funding is returned to local authorities and not retained at the centre, maintaining a full range of services at St Helier hospital, improving air quality, increasing the number of school places, cleanliness of streets, town centre regeneration and ensuring Merton remains a low crime borough.

The Chief Executive said local government is in a difficult financial position and as a result council ambitions will be challenging to deliver over the next four years. All

councils are facing a similar situation; this is driven by the rising costs of adult and children's social care, with not enough resources to meet the level of demand.

The council is working with health partners to address these challenges by working in Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships to change the way health is delivered. The new approach aims to strengthen primary care and widen the range of services offered in the community to reduce pressure on hospitals.

The Leader and Chief Executive provided additional information in response to questions:

- There has been some concern about Clarion Housing response to repairs. Although there has been a decrease in number of complaints, further improvements still need to be made. We will continue to monitor the situation and ensure that agreed commitments are being met.
- The council is looking at a number of ways to increase revenue streams. The Commercial Strategy seeks to maximise return from assets. Some initiatives have been very successful such as the Contractors Health and Safety Scheme(CHAS). Other innovations include shared services and outsourced services and sweating assets in the Civic Centre.
- The Council will ensure there is an increase in the level of affordable housing at the Plough Lane site. Commitments will be secured by publishing viability reports from the outset.
- The London's Best Council Programme will be measured by 40 performance indicators.
- The council is currently holding detailed discussions with Veolia regarding breaches within their contract. It is hoped that an agreement will be reached rather than a process of formal arbitration.
- A social value tool could demonstrate how community assets contribute to the local economy through enhancing health and wellbeing. However difficult decisions remain about which services take priority in a challenging financial climate.
- Merton is developing a landlord registration scheme which should be implemented within the next eighteen months. National legislation would be helpful and we are working closely with the Greater London Assembly and looking at good practice in other areas.
- The council is progressing in looking for opportunities for outsourcing and shared services. The South London Partnership has asked Chief Executives

to identify prospective options. It is important to evaluate each provider to determine the best option for Merton residents.

RESOLVED

The Chief Executive and Leader were thanked for attending the Commission.

5 MERTON PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT (Agenda Item 5)

The Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, gave an overview the report. He stated that although the partnership is working well, partners are moving into sub regional membership which may have implications for the future.

In response to questions, it was reported that a recent analysis of community cohesion in the south of the borough found that although there are no particular concerns in relation to community cohesion, there are low levels of social capital and a small minority of residents are dissatisfied with how the borough is changing. An environmental improvement day is taking place in August to bring people together. Also, further work is planned in the Autumn around community development working with MVSC and the Sutton equivalent. There are also important lessons for the new Community Strategy which is currently in development.

RESOLVED

The Head of Policy, Strategy and Partnerships, agreed to circulate:

A detailed version of the performance report set out on Page 32.

Further detail on outcome 4 including the reasons for the focus on Wimbledon Park

6 ANALYSIS OF THE ANNUAL MEMBER SCRUTINY SURVEY 2018 (Agenda Item 6)

In response to questions it was reported that there was an independent review of scrutiny by Professor Steve Leach in 2009. Merton is also a member of the London Scrutiny Network which provides an opportunity to benchmark and learn from good practice elsewhere.

Commission members would like a better understanding of the effectiveness of scrutiny with an analysis of the annual survey according to respondent's role such as cabinet member or chair.

Resolved

Commission members thanked the scrutiny team for their work.

7 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19 (Agenda Item 7)

The Commission agreed to:

Re-establish the Financial Monitoring Task Group, the Head of Democracy Services will email councilors inviting membership.

Councillor Carl Quilliam to meet with the Commission Chair and Head of Democracy Services to consider a rapporteur into Impact of Brexit on EU citizens in Merton, looking at support the council could provide until the final deal is reached.

Establish a task group looking at road safety. The draft scope and terms of reference to report back to the Commission.

8 DISCUSSION OF QUESTIONS FOR THE BOROUGH COMMANDER (Agenda Item 8)

The Chair asked for questions for the Borough Commander to be sent to the Head of Democracy Services by the 31st July.